My Lady of Cleeve

Percy J. Hartley

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MY LADY OF CLEEVE

"'I give the lives of these gentlemen to you. Your secret is your own'" [p. 180]

MY LADY OF CLEEVE

BY

PERCY J. HARTLEY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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MY LADY OF CLEEVE

CHAPTER I

OF HOW WE CAME TO CLEEVE

"YONDER is Cleeve!" said the sergeant.

I held up my hand and the troopers halted. The rain, which had been falling steadily since noon, had now ceased; and a watery gleam of sunshine bursting from the sullen stormclouds overhead lighted up the crest of the hill upon which we stood, and the well-wooded Cleeve valley below us, than which there is none more beautiful in all Devonshire. Behind us lay the barren surface of the torrs—mile upon mile of rock-strewn, wind-swept summits—thrusting their gaunt and rugged outlines high into the air in spurs as varied as they were fantastical. But at our feet the ground fell sharply away, covered with a wealth of golden gorse and bracken and scattered clumps of timber that grew ever thicker toward the bottom of the valley; yielding nevertheless the glimpse of a white road which wound its way serpentlike down the centre.

Here and there also the glitter of water showed through the trees, where some streamlet kissed by the sun's rays shone with the radiance of burnished silver. From thence the woods rose in one dense mass upon the opposite

slope, until they broke at length upon the very edge of the rocky cliffs that guard this portion of the coast, and beyond these again were the dark green waters of the Channel.

It was a scene that at any other time would have compelled my ardent admiration. The fertile valley nestling at our feet, clothed with its rich carpet of oaks and beeches, and rendered doubly welcome by contrast with the bleak, treeless surface of the torrs through which we had toiled since daybreak. But befouled with mud, wet and weary, we were in no condition to mark its beauties or to appreciate them. Moreover, though it was yet early June, a cold wind was rising, rustling in the tree-tops below us and bringing with it the odour of the sea.

As we sat there upon the brow of the hill, the steam from our jaded horses rising around us, we shivered in our saddles. For the last two hours, save for a muttered oath from one or other of the troopers when their weary animals stumbled, we had ridden for the most part in silence. Even Graham—gayest and most debonnaire of cornets—had scarce opened his lips save to answer some remark in monosyllables. And that fact alone was more significant than words to prove to what a state of depression the lonely torrs and the falling rain had reduced us. He had fallen somewhat behind with De Brito, but they spurred forward now upon seeing me halt. I had, I confess, no great liking for Cornet Brito; though to give him his due, had he paid less attention to the wine bottle he had the making of a good sword. But his was a

coarse, brutal nature—sullen, revengeful, and without restraint—alien alike in every respect to my own. For I hold that a man may be forced to live by the wits that Nature has provided him with—he may be forced to sell his sword and service to the highest bidder—but he need not forget, thank God, that he was born a gentleman.

As for Cornet Graham, he was a merry, careless-hearted boy in appearance, with an eye for every comely maid, and a mind, one would have thought, running only upon the sit of his peruke or the latest fashion in sword knots. Yet his slight figure and fair boyish face belied his nature, which was as keen and ruthless as any of the troopers plodding at our heels. Even now I noted at a glance that though he was as wet through as the rest of us, no mud splash soiled his clothes. And his white cravat limp though it was, was yet tied in a fashion that would have done credit to the Mall or St. James's. Indeed, to him London was the world.

"A curse on these endless hills!" said De Brito sullenly, as they drew rein at my side. "Why do we halt?"

For answer I pointed to where some three miles to our right, on the opposite side of the valley, and perched apparently upon the very edge of the cliff, the grey stone chimneys of a house rose above the surrounding trees. Beyond this the mighty head of Cleevesborough reared itself into the sky. And at its foot, marked by the smoke which hung, motionless, in the heavy air above it, lay the little port of Cleeve, to which it gives its name.

"Yonder is our goal!" I said curtly.

'Twas a sight to see the way in which his dark face brightened at the prospect.

"Then push on, in the devil's name!" he cried querulously. "There is an inn at Cleeve?"

"I do not know," I answered shortly, my mind running at the time upon far other matters.

"Who talks of inns at such a moment?—though an inn there is, and a good one!" said Cornet Graham. "But there is a woman yonder,—to see whose face is worth twenty such wettings."

"Perdition take the woman!" growled De Brito in reply. "Give me a roaring fire and a cup of sack to keep out this cursed wet! Burn me! Women are as plentiful as blackberries; aye, and as cheap for the plucking."

"But not such as this one!" cried the younger man with some heat. "'Tis five years ago, I swear, since I saw her first in London. But she was accounted then the toast of the Court by those most competent to judge in such matters; aye, even by King Charles himself—may the devil rest his soul! He deserved well of his people, seeing that he did his best to be a father to them."

"So that, but for the accident of his death, we might have had a second Castlemaine," I put in sneeringly. The mention of this woman, about whom the cornet had raved unceasingly since he had learned our destination, jarred upon my ears. He shook his head in dubious fashion.

"You do not know her," he answered reflectively.

"Proud as Lucifer, she is no woman to play the wanton, even to a king! Cold as proud, she is——"

"Pshaw, man! For shame! 'Tis my belief you think more of this paragon of virtue's face than of the business that we have in hand."

"Why not?" he cried quickly. "'Fore gad! Spies and Papists are common enough at present, but there is only one Lady Lettice Ingram, and—why, curse it, Cassilis, she is one of the loveliest women in England—the favourite toast of every tavern in town!"

"Such is fame!" I remarked caustically, and fell to scanning the house again. And I confess that the longer I gazed, the more difficult appeared my task.

For these were stirring times, and it behooved every man to keep a still tongue and a ready blade. All England was divided into two factions. The one still clinging to the restoration of the Stuart in the person of James II, the other content to follow the fortunes of Dutch William. Moreover, in every shire throughout the country were the spies and agents of the French king, working in secret to foment a rising among the Catholics. For Louis XIV. must have a finger in every European pie.

It was to arrest one of these agents—no less a person than the Marquis de Launay—that I had been sent hastily from Exeter, information coming to the authorities that he was in hiding at Cleeve Manor, an old Tudor mansion on the coast of Torbay belonging to the Ingram family, who were staunch upholders of the old religion,

and the head of whom it was whispered was already with King James in Ireland, and high in his favour.

As I sat now, pondering upon the best way to carry out my orders, I saw at a glance that, standing as it did upon the edge of the cliff, to ride up to the front of the manor would be to render it an easy task for our quarry to escape by sea. Clearly, by some means we must gain the beach, in order to cut off any such method of escape from the rear. Accordingly, I told off the sergeant and a dozen men for this duty, with whom I purposed going myself, bidding the two cornets to lie hidden with the remainder of the troop until dark, and to then follow the road leading to the manor. Arrived there, Cornet Graham was to surround the front of the house, but to await an agreed signal between us ere he attempted to force an entrance. Meanwhile, De Brito and twenty troopers would ride on and overawe the village, a task which I knew would be both welcome and congenial to his temperament; nor was I wrong in so thinking. As I made an end of my instructions, he drew his thick and grizzled brows together in a sullen scowl that boded mischief.

"You need fear no trouble from that quarter," he said grimly. "I know my work too well."

"Aye, but none of your devil's tricks here!" I retorted sharply. "We are not in Tangiers!"

For a moment his swarthy face wore an ugly look and his fingers sought his hilt. But he thought better of it.

"Leave me to do my own business in my own way!" he muttered sullenly. "Give me the village and the

tavern—and slit me if I interfere with you in the matter of the dainty doves yonder!" And he nodded in the direction of the house.

His tone was one of such studied insolence that at any other time I should have called him to account. As it was, I shrugged my shoulders contemptuously and turned to Cornet Graham. On my life, he had pulled a little comb from his pocket and with this he was endeavouring to smooth his matted periwig.

"Remember," I said warningly, "M. de Launay is to be taken alive."

"If he is there at all," he answered, "and this does not prove a fool's errand!"

"It is like enough to be that," I said carelessly, "since it is a king's. But be consoled. At least, you will see this Venus!"

He cried out something at that, but I did not stay to hear. I gathered up my reins and, with a wave of the hand, rode after the troopers.

They had halted at the edge of the road awaiting my orders, and I saw that the sergeant had made a careful selection for the arduous work they had before them. As they sat there in their saddles, their fierce, swarthy faces bronzed to a coppery hue by the scorching suns of Tangiers, their coats, once red—worn and faded to a mottled purple, they were as ill-favoured a set of rogues as one could meet, not even excepting Kirk's Lambs. I placed myself at their head, therefore, and leaving the road behind us, we plunged at once into the woods. So dense were these that ere we had proceeded more than

a quarter of a mile I was compelled to dismount the men and to send back our horses in charge of two of their number. With the remaining troopers at my heels, I essayed to make the ascent on foot. Nor was it an easy task even then. From every branch the rain-drops dripped upon us, so that, wet before, we were doubly so ere we had advanced but a short distance. Tripping over roots, torn by brambles, a dozen times we came down upon our faces, rendering us in a truly pitiable condition when at length we reached the summit. Nor did luck befriend us even then.

In front of us and on either side the woods spread to the edge of the cliff, the latter falling sheer away to give us a sight of the white-capped rollers, over which the gulls were wheeling, three hundred feet below, and with no sign of a path by which we might gain the shore. We separated now, making our way right and left as fast as the thick growth and the slippery nature of the ground would permit, while in my heart I cursed the delay, for the light was fading fast. It was not long before a shout from one of the troopers proclaimed that he had stumbled upon that which we sought. I made my way to his side as quickly as possible, and found him standing on the brink of a little combe, a mere cleft in the hillside, its sides thickly wooded, and with a swift stream, swollen by the rains from the torrs above, flowing in a succession of white-lipped falls down its centre. It was not an inviting road to take, and I would willingly have sought for a more open spot, but we had already lost more time than we could well spare, and dusk had

fallen on the silent woods. Moreover, the heavy grey clouds, drifting low from the direction of the sea, momentarily grew darker and more threatening, giving promise of further rain. I rallied the troopers, therefore, at the head of the combe, and with the sergeant at my heels, plunged into the glen.

At first the ground was fairly open, and we were enabled to make good progress through the thickets of alders and rushes that fringed the banks of the stream, but ever as we advanced the green walls of the glen grew steeper and narrower, until we were forced to take to the stream itself, making our way from stone to stone that lay mossgrown and prostrate in its bed, or at times wading ankle deep through some shallow pool. It was as if we were cut off from the world. A damp, earthy smell, begotten of the winter's leaves' decay, filled the air. There was no sound save the song of the water swirling at our feet as it brawled amongst the pebbles and chafed in its narrow course, the occasional fall of a branch upon the hillside above, and in the distance the ever-increasing murmur of the sea.

For over half a mile we proceeded thus, so that it was with no little satisfaction that at length we saw the light, such as it was, gradually strengthening in front of us. Now the trees grew thinner, admitting a breath of sea air, which stole through their twisted trunks and fanned our faces. As we continued to advance, the glen as suddenly receded, and a moment or two later we came out upon the beach.

We found ourselves in a little shingle-covered bay, the

extremities of which were shut in by the rocks, giving us no sight of what lay beyond. Above our heads on either side towered a mighty wall of rock, its grey, rugged surface broken here and there by patches of withered grass. And here the sergeant, who was a few paces in front of me, suddenly stopped.

He was a grizzled, battle-scarred veteran of the wars of Flanders, with whom I had once made a campaign upon the Rhine, and to whom for that reason I allowed some freedom. His looks, ill-favoured enough at best, were in no way improved by the scar of an old sword cut gained in some wild foray against the Turk, which scar, starting from his right eyebrow, stretched crosswise to his chin; twisting both nose and lips to their utter detriment and imparting a peculiarly forbidding and saturnine expression to his face.

"What is it?" I said sharply. "Why do you halt, man? The tide is out, and the light will serve."

"Aye," he answered slowly, "the tide is out, but——"

"But what?" I cried impatiently. "Come, out with it if you have anything to say!"

"Well, I like not that!" he rejoined with some hesitation, pointing out to sea.

Following the direction of his outstretched arm, away over the surface of the water, some two miles distant, but creeping each minute slowly and insidiously nearer, stretched a white wall of vapour, beneath which gleamed the foam-crested summits of the waves.

"Well?" I said contemptuously. "What of it? Have

you never seen a sea fog before, or are you afraid?" I continued with a sneer.

"Neither of man nor devil!" he retorted with some heat. And to do him justice, I knew that he spoke truth. "But this—this is different. To be caught against that"—he nodded toward the cliff—"and to be drowned like rats!"

I saw that his words were not without effect. The troopers, already wearied by the day's exertions, glanced askance at one another and began to mutter. At all hazards this must be stopped, and at once. I faced round on them.

"Who talks of drowning?" I cried angrily. "Curse you for a fool, man! 'Tis but a mile to go at most. But if you fear to venture, sergeant," I continued, "you can return the way we came. And stay, I will send a couple of men back with you to bear you company; you will find it dark in the glen!"

He saluted at that, a flush of shame upon his face.

"Very well," he said slowly; "let it be forward then. Only—I have warned you."

"And you others!" I continued in a fierce tone, turning upon them and letting my hand fall lightly upon the butt of the pistol in my sash. "Have you anything to say, or do you forget who I am, you knaves? I will find a quicker death than yonder waves for the first man among you who questions my orders!"

I looked them squarely in the face, and their muttering died away. Steeped as they were in crime and license, I was their master, and they knew it. For a moment or

two longer I remained silent to give full effect to my words, but not a man spoke.

"Forward then!" I said shortly; and we set off along the beach.

Not that their fears were altogether without foundation. The intense loneliness of the spot, increased as it was by the gathering dusk, was sufficient to daunt the stoutest heart. The wind was rising, moaning in the cavernous hollows and crevices of the cliff, from which came ever and anon the weird cry of some sea fowl, circling round its nest in the rocky wall above. And save for this there was no other sound but the hoarse murmur of the swift, incoming tide.

Rounding the rocks which screened the bay, we found ourselves in a second one, a complete replica of the first. And beyond us, headland upon headland, serrated against the darkening sky, stretched faint and shadowy into the far distance.

Our progress was slow, for the beach was composed of small, slate-coloured pebbles, flattened and rounded by the wash of endless surges, and into which our heavy military boots sank deep at every step. Here and there we were forced to skirt some mass of lichen-covered rocks; which, torn from the cliff side, lay scattered upon the shore at its base, their sharp, needle-like summits wreathed with tangled seaweed and their caves and hollows filled with the flotsam of the tides.

And now the fog rolled down upon us, at first in thin wreaths of vapour that floated in ghost-like silence like the first sentinels of an advancing army, but growing

ever thicker and thicker as they approached landwards, until they wrapped us completely round in their damp embrace, blotting out everything from our vision save the wall of cliff upon our right, which loomed dark and menacing through the mist. The wind rose as suddenly to a gale, sending the fog wreaths eddying around us, and bringing with it a cold rain that at every successive gust beat in our faces, blinding and confusing us. A hundred times I cursed my folly and recalled the sergeant's warning. He was at my elbow now, at times his figure appearing distorted and giant-like as the fog thinned somewhat; anon banishing altogether from my vision, swallowed up by the mist.

How long we struggled on thus, buffeted by the wind and rain, falling over the jutting rocks, I do not know; but it was in a lull in the gale, when the wind died down for a moment and the fog lifted, that I felt myself seized by the arm and plucked violently backward. It was none too soon. From out of the mist ahead appeared a green wall of water capped with foam. Down it thundered, breaking upon the pebbles at my feet, sending the salt spume flying above my head and swirling round my knees in a cataract of foam.

Even then, so sudden was the surprise, that the back-wash was like to have swept me from my feet; but the sergeant's grip tightened upon my arm and dragged me back to safety. And in a moment I realised what had happened. We had reached the end of the bay, into which the sea had already entered. I put my lips to the sergeant's ear.

"Back to the cliff," I shouted, "and climb, man! Climb, or——"

There was no need to finish the sentence. Not a man there but knew our danger. We began to retrace our steps. It had grown so dark now that it was only when the curtain of fog parted to a more violent gust than usual that I was enabled to distinguish the form of the trooper upon my right. The rain which we had experienced all day was as nothing to that which fell upon us now. It descended in sheets, drenching us to the skin and numbing us with its icy cold. For a while, indeed, a species of coma seized me. I thought of the cornets waiting in the roadway above, and wondered idly whether they would succeed in achieving the arrest of the man we had come so far to seek, and whether, by chance, upon the morrow they would find some relic of our party floating in the wash of the tide to tell the story of our fate, for I did not deceive myself. To climb the cliff even in the daylight would have been a hard enough feat; to do so at night, in the darkness and fog, was an impossibility. And though I was willing enough for the troopers' sake to make the attempt—aye, and to encourage the effort—yet in my heart I knew that there could be but one ending.

It seemed hard, I remember thinking dully, that a man who had passed unscathed through the perils of many battlefields—hard for a man who had made a campaign with Montecuccoli, and whose arms had held the great Turenne as he fell from his horse, struck down by a cannon-ball upon the banks of the Rhine—to be drowned

at the last in a little bay upon the lonely Devon coast. I was aroused from these reflections by the sound of an oath and a heavy fall, as the trooper upon my left stumbled over a black mass which loomed up suddenly in his path. He was on his feet again ere I could reach his side, and gave vent to such a ringing shout that it pierced above the gale and brought us all around him. That which he had fallen over, very providentially as it proved for us, was a boat anchored to the beach by a short length of rope fastened to a stone. With renewed hope we scattered again in search of the path which the inmates of the manor must have been in the habit of using when passing to and fro to this small craft. At length an idea struck me, and raising my hand to pass it carefully over the rocky wall above me at a little above the level of my shoulder, I came upon a ledge. By climbing upon the sergeant's bent back, I was enabled to draw myself up to it at the cost of a few bruises, and to clamber upon its flat surface.

It was, as near as I could judge, some ten feet square, and in the far corner my hands came in contact with a flight of steps leading upwards, roughly hewn in the cliff side. Five minutes later the whole party of us stood upon a little platform, side by side. And then, drawing a long breath, I essayed to make the ascent.

There were eighteen steps in all, giving place to a path, a mere narrow ledge on the surface of the cliff, at no place more than four feet wide, and with a sheer drop upon the one side to the beach below. Along this we crept, at every fresh gust of wind flattening ourselves

against the rocky wall upon the right and clinging to its jagged fissures. It was a weird experience, I vow, to be suspended thus 'twixt sea and sky; no sound save the whistling of the wind in the crannies of the cliff, the roar of the pitiless surges below us, or the harsh scream of a gull from the mist out at sea. Yet I have travelled this same path since by daylight, and I have often thought that the thickness of the fog upon that night was most fortunate for us, sparing us, as it did, the full knowledge of the yawning which lay at our side, the sight of which might well have turned the strongest head giddy. Even as it was, at a place where the ledge took a sharp turning, a sudden blast struck me with such violence that, taken off my guard, for a moment I was in danger of being torn from my foothold, and only by driving my nails into a crack of the rock until the fingers themselves were left all raw and bleeding was I enabled to withstand its boisterous pressure.

The breeze passed. And taking courage of my experience, I made haste to round the dangerous corner, shouting back a word of warning to the file of men creeping at my heels. Even as we ascended the noise of the waves grew fainter, until, after travelling some twenty minutes thus, a new sound was added to the patter of the rain upon the side of the cliff—namely, the howl of the wind in the treetops above us.

A last effort as the way grew steeper yet, and I gained the summit, to fling myself panting and exhausted upon the turf in the thick darkness beyond.

CHAPTER II

OF THE LIGHT THAT SHONE IN THE FOG

It must have been for the space of full five minutes that I lay thus, with quivering nerves and labouring breath, upon the sodden ground, with the raindrops beating down upon me, ere I roused myself sufficiently to get to my feet and call to the sergeant. His voice answered me from out of the night, somewhere at my side. I bade him ascertain that none of the party had got separated in the darkness. Accordingly, he called the troopers one by one, and at each name an invisible speaker answered: "Here!"

"They are all present!" said the sergeant gruffly, who, though distant from me but some three feet or so, showed only as a darker patch upon the murk beyond. It was the very gloom of Egypt that encompassed us. Therefore, I gave instructions that each trooper should lay hold of the belt of the man in front of him, and setting our faces away from the direction of the sea, we moved slowly through the inky blackness that surrounded us. That there were trees around us I had ample proof, not only by the sound of the wind whistling in their branches overhead, but also by the fact that ere we had advanced a dozen yards I tripped over a projecting root, my head coming into such violent contact with an unseen tree, that I was glad to lean for a moment or two, sick and

dizzy, against its knotted trunk. Thereafter I was more careful, feeling my way from tree to tree, and probing the darkness in front with my sheathed sword.

We had been moving a long time thus, or so it seemed, when the trees on either side abruptly ceased, and turn it which way I would, my sword encountered only empty air. Across this open space we slowly moved till at the thirty-seventh step as I counted my sword struck with a sharp tinkle against what I took for the moment to be a stone wall. It was not until I had passed my hand over its flat surface and down its base that I discovered the nature of the object upon which we had stumbled. It was the sun-dial, such as I had often seen in France, and I knew by its shape that I was not mistaken. From this I argued we were somewhere within the gardens belonging to the house, and here the man who was behind me (it was the sergeant) loosened his hold, and I felt him groping upon the ground at my feet. Presently he rose, as I could tell by the sound of his voice.

"There is a path here," he said; "I can feel its border. Aye, and a broad one."

"In that case," I answered, "lead on! The house cannot be far away."

I resigned my place to him, therefore, at the head, and with frequent stoppages we made our way slowly along the path. A dozen times at least we strayed from the track, and it was only with the greatest patience that we were enabled to retrace our steps. We must have travelled thus for some five or six hundred yards, when we almost ran into a stone wall, that lay on the right-

hand side of the path, and saw before us a dark mass looming through the mist. We felt our way by the side of this wall until, upon turning sharply round the corner, the sergeant's hand was laid upon my arm, and we came to a sudden halt. For there, not twenty feet distant, from an open doorway, a bright light was streaming out into the fog.

For the moment we were sheltered somewhat from the wind by the building itself, and I thought that in between the gusts I could distinguish the sound of voices. Though this was the very thing we had expected to encounter, yet so long had our eyes been accustomed to the darkness, that it came even now as somewhat of a surprise to us and we stood staring stupidly before us. Moreover, the light from whatever source it came did not burn steadily, but every now and then it was partially obscured, as if some one or something came between it and the doorway, to burst forth a moment later with renewed brilliance, flinging its yellow aureole of light upon the fog, and serving but to increase the impenetrable shadow that lay beyond. I came to myself with a start and slowly unsheathed my sword; and I heard a faint tinkle of steel go rippling into the darkness behind me as the troopers did the same. Then, with the sergeant at my side, I stole quietly forward, and halting at the edge of the circle of light, ourselves unseen in the shadow, we peered into the room.

At first I could see nothing, but as my eyes grew accustomed to the brightness within, I was enabled to make out the interior. It was a stable, and by the light

of a couple of lanterns hung upon the wall an old man was whisping the mud stains from a magnificent chestnut mare, pausing every now and again to rub her sleek, glossy sides. A younger man muffled in a cloak was standing with his back to us, a lantern at his feet.

My eyes were rivetted upon the mare, for I have ever been a lover of horses, and indeed to a man who has spent the better part of twenty years in the saddle and who has owed his life again and again to the speed of the animal beneath him, the love of them becomes as it were a second nature. I saw that this was an animal rarely met with in a thousand and that it carried a lady's saddle and bore the signs of recent hard riding.

I started when the sergeant touched my arm and pointed to the younger man's belt. Following the direction of his outstretched hand, I saw that this man's cloak had fallen open and that he carried a bunch of keys at his side. By this I judged him, and rightly so, as it proved, to be the steward. This was a stroke of unexpected good fortune, for the means of gaining access to the house now lay to our hands.

It was this latter who was speaking, every word coming plainly to our ears through the open door.

"Hast nearly finished?" he said impatiently.

"Finished?" said the other, in a high-pitched, querulous voice, and I saw he raised his head and disclosed a yellow face seamed with a hundred wrinkles, that he was much older than I had first thought, and with the unmistakable look of a man who has spent his life amongst horses. "How should I be finished—and look at Carola!

Been down on her knees, she has! But what does my lady care? She can stop in the light and warmth yonder. 'Tis old Reuben must clean her horse. Let old Reuben go out in the wet and fog. Nobody minds what happens to him!" He broke off in a fit of coughing.

"How now, old grumbler!" said the other sharply. "That is a lie, and you know it! Aye, and if my lady heard you she would make you smart for those words!"

The old man looked up with a grin that disclosed the few yellow stumps remaining in his head. "She would that, lad!" he chuckled. The steward nodded gravely.

"You will find that my lady does not forget a service," he said slowly.

"God bless her!" said the old man softly, stooping once more to his work.

"Amen to that," the steward answered.

So that for the first time my curiosity was aroused as to what manner of woman this could be of whom they spoke in such terms.

"Aye, it will be a bad day for us all if she should marry this Frenchman," he continued, shaking his head.

"The devil take all Frenchmen!" the old man burst out in his thin, quavering voice, and with true insular prejudice. "She will wed a man—a man, I tell thee—not a tricked-out, scented popinjay. Frenchman indeed," he continued with fine contempt. "Mark my words, lad! Eight and sixty year I've lived here, boy and man, and I've never seen a Frenchman yet that was a man! It's not in 'em, lad! It's not born in 'em!"

"I misdoubt you have seen one at all before, old Reuben!" answered the other, but the old man only continued to nod and mutter to himself. "But every one to their taste," the steward added. "My lady will make a good match, and a good wife."

"Aye," the man Reuben answered, "when she is tamed, lad; when she is tamed—and Lord help the tamer!" he added with a chuckle that trailed off into a fit of coughing. The steward waited until he had recovered his breath, then:

"There be some at the house yonder who think 'tis Mistress Grace he would be wedding," he said slowly, but the old man only shook his head.

"It's not my lady," he answered doggedly. "I'll take my oath of that! No, nor Mistress Grace either."

"Then why is he here?" cried the steward eagerly. "Tell me that!" The other raised his head with a cunning look on his wrinkled face.

"I have heard it said that James Stuart is in Ireland," he said slowly.

"Bah!" the man in the cloak answered. "Every one knows that!"

"Hark to that now!" the old man replied, apostrophising the mare, that by way of answer whinnied softly and laid her head upon his shoulder. "Every one knows that! Every one knows——" He broke off with a half inaudible chuckle.

"Well, 'tis true, is it not, old dotard?" said the other sharply.

"How should I know?" answered the old man queru-

lously. "Reuben the dotard! Reuben the fool!" and again he laughed mirthlessly.

"Mark you," said the steward quickly, "I love not Dutch William. I am for the Stuarts, I! But this I say, that James is no fighter, and if he should give battle to William—pho!" And he snapped his fingers expressively.

"Aye, if he should!" the other replied significantly. "But—" and he sank his voice slightly—"what if he were to slip away and leave this Dutch hog in Ireland! What if he were to land here?"

"Here?" the steward cried in a startled tone.

"Here!" the old man went on triumphantly, "and the Earl with him! Why, at the master's call we'd have the whole countryside in arms!"

"Aye, but what has the Frenchman to do with it?" the other cried in a tone of bewilderment.

"Nay, how should I know!" he replied, grinning. "Reuben the dotard! Only, did ever a Stuart have money!" he added softly, with a glance of contempt at the man before him.

A light seemed to break upon the steward. "Ha, I see!" he cried excitedly. "Then you think——"

"I think that the mare is listening," said the old man with a sour smile, and he stooped to continue his task. Nor for all the steward's entreaties would he again open his mouth. He gave up the attempt at length.

"Well," he said reluctantly, "I may not bide here longer. Do you make haste, and we will talk of this again." He stooped and raised the lantern from the

floor, and with this swaying in his hand he came toward the open doorway to walk into our arms.

When the sergeant had clapped a pistol to his head there was no more surprised a man in all England. He could not be expected to know the fact that the wet had long since rendered the weapon useless. As for the old man, he stood rigid, as if petrified, with open mouth and staring eyes, and I saw that we had nothing to fear from him. I turned therefore to the younger man, who stood in the sergeant's grip, the very picture of astonishment. Behind us the troopers crowded into the room.

"Now, my friend," I said quietly, picking up the lantern from the ground—it had fallen from his hand—"I desire a word with you!"

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he stammered, when at last he found his tongue. That soldiers should rise up out of the night in the very centre of his master's lands was a thing apparently beyond his power to grasp. He was a man of about forty, as near as I could judge, and he bore the look of one to whom good living came habitual. I did not anticipate having much trouble with him, but in this I proved to be mistaken.

"As to who I am," I answered sharply, "I am a king's officer; let that be sufficient for you! And for the rest, I have need of your assistance, and also some information. You are, I take it, steward to the Earl of Ingram, who, I understand, is at present with the man James Stuart in Ireland, and high in his favour?"

He looked at me, scowling, but he did not speak.

"Answer, will you!" cried the sergeant, thrust-

ing his scarred visage within a foot of the other's head.

"Yes," he replied sullenly, shrinking from the sergeant's fierce face.

"Good," I answered. "I see that we shall get on, my friend. You were speaking a while ago of a Frenchman. Nay, do not give yourself the trouble of denying it. He is still here?"

"And if so, what then?" he said suspiciously, heedless of the sergeant's threatening look.

"Only that I desire speech of this same gentleman," I answered, "and I have ridden far to get it. In the first place, how many servants are there in the house yonder?"

He hesitated for a moment, then:

"There are but a dozen," he replied.

"Are you sure there are no more?" I said sharply. "The truth, man!"

"I have told you," he answered sulkily; "and the half of these are women."

"Very good," I answered; "that is sufficient. You will now lead us to the house, and—for I see that you have the keys—you will show us how best to gain an entrance."

"I'll not do it," he burst out on a sudden, to my astonishment, for I had not given the man credit for so much courage. "I tell you I will take no part in it! I will do nothing that shall injure my ladies!"

"You are a fool!" I said tartly, for I was fast losing patience. Time was passing, and I was anxious to get the business over in order to dry my wet clothes, which clung to me with a chilly persistency. Moreover, I

thought it more than probable that Cornet Graham would have already arrived ere this at the house, and, believing that some accident had surely befallen us, would proceed to execute his commission in his own way. In that case I had missed what credit there might be attached to the actual capture. "I have told you that it is with this gentleman I wish to speak. I have nothing to do with aught else."

"Yet I will not do it," he said doggedly. "You may find the key for yourself."

"Perhaps the flame of yon candle across his wrists would make him alter his mind," growled the sergeant.

I saw the man turn white at the words, but he uttered no sound. "Hark you, fellow!" I said harshly. "I have no time to waste in trifling. I will give you till I count ten to say if you will do as I desire, and I should recommend you to reconsider your decision, otherwise——"

I caught the sergeant's eye. He grinned and commenced to unwind his sash. In the dead silence that followed, a silence broken only by the whistling of the wind without, that set the lanterns flickering and the shadows dancing on the walls, I began slowly to count. The troopers stood around, leaning on their swords, in keen expectation of that which was to come.

It was a strange scene upon which the lantern light fell. The mare regarding the intruders with a mild surprise, the prisoner in the centre, silent and sullen, and lastly, the ring of ruthless faces, upon which were stamped all the baser passions of cruelty and lust.

"Eight, nine"—I made a longer pause—"ten!"

The man before me had neither moved nor spoken as yet, but now he broke out again:

"I will not do it! You may flog me first! I will say no more!"

The sergeant's eye had been busy searching the room.

"We shall not flog you," he said grimly. "Make your mind easy as to that. But," he continued, "there is a hook above, I see, and a strong one. Here, one of you, bring me that rope yonder. I will teach him how we unloose tongues in Tangiers!"

The words seemed to arouse the steward to a sense of his danger, for he made an unexpected dash for the door. But the troopers were too quick for him. There was a short struggle, a volley of curses as the man was borne down and his arms pinioned behind his back. A trooper climbed upon the stall and flung the rope over the hook in the ceiling. A couple more dragged their prisoner across, and making a running noose, slipped it over his head, and three pairs of willing hands seized the other end of the rope, and the thing was done with a celerity of dispatch that bespoke long practice. They but awaited my signal. I was loth to give this, for I would have spared the man if I could, but I saw no other way to make him speak. I was about to give it, therefore, when there came an unexpected interruption. Up till now the old man I have before mentioned had stood a still and silent spectator of the scene being enacted, but seeing his companion standing with the rope round his neck, and reading for the first time the doom in store for him, he suddenly moved forward, striving to push his way to his side.

"You devils!" he cried shrilly, "let the man go! Let him go, I say!"

"To your kennel, old Beelzebub!" cried a trooper roughly with a blow on the mouth that sent him reeling backwards, to fall beneath the horse's feet, where he lay whimpering senilely among the straw.

I turned again to the prisoner.

"Once more," I said shortly, "will you lead and gain us an entrance to the house—yes or no?"

His white lips quivered for answer, but no sound escaped them. He seemed like one dazed.

The sergeant looked inquiringly across at me. I nodded grimly and stepped through the open door. I was desirous of ascertaining if the fog had lifted, and there are some things it is better not to see. It was intensely dark outside the circle of light thrown by the lanterns, yet after standing for a short time probing the blackness with my eyes I thought that the mist had certainly grown somewhat thinner, for I could dimly make out the form of the bushes opposite me and the pathway at my feet running into the gloom. I made my way a short distance along this, keeping in touch with the wall upon my right. The rain was still falling heavily, and the wind moaned in the treetops above with a sound like the wailing of lost souls in pain. From the room behind me came one cry that pierced the fog and reached my ears above the gale, and then silence.

The sergeant was a persuasive man. It was in less than five minutes that, looking back, I saw his figure appear in the doorway. Shading his eyes with his hand,

he stood peering out into the darkness. I slowly retraced my steps.

It was not until I was at his side that he saw me. He gave a start at my sudden appearance; and held out his hand. "Here is the key," he said with a grin; "and he has changed his mind." I took the key and followed him into the room.

The steward lay upon the ground with blackened face and distorted features. They had taken the rope from round his neck and it now hung dangling from the hook above. He had the appearance of a man in the last extremity.

"You have gone too far," I said, frowning. "The man is dying!"

"Not he," the sergeant answered. "We did but give him an extra dance on air in case the way should slip his memory."

He stooped as he spoke, and lifting the man's body, propped him with his back against the stall; and picking up the bucket that lay beside the mare, he flung the contents upon his head. It had the desired effect. In less than five minutes the shadow faded from his face, his breathing grew more regular. Presently they raised him to his feet and—supported by a trooper on either side—he stood breathing heavily.

"Will you guide us now?" said the sergeant fiercely, "or must we string you up again?"

The man before us gave a slight gesture of assent. He was too far gone to speak.

"And play us no tricks," the sergeant growled. "I

have made better men speak than you, though they were heathen—aye, and be silent too!" And he passed his hand across his throat with a gesture there was no mistaking.

I waited a few minutes longer for the knave to recover himself and while they bound the old man to the head of the stall, where he stood mumbling incoherent curses; and then, thrusting the lantern into the steward's shaking hand, guarded by the troopers on either side, we set out on our way. I had thought that the house lay close at hand, but this was not the case. Now that we were in the open air, the cold wind and the rain beating upon his bare head had a reviving effect upon the steward, and he led us unfalteringly through the darkness. He turned sharply to the right; and by the flickering light cast by the lantern, I could see that we were upon a broad gravel walk and that the trees on either side had given place to well-kept lawns and beds of flowers, over which the wind swept boisterously.

Suddenly the lantern swung to the left; and a moment or two later the sergeant rapped out an oath.

"What is the matter?" I said sharply.

"We have left the path!" he cried.

I snatched the lantern from the steward's hand and saw that the sergeant had spoken the truth. There was turf beneath our feet. A sudden suspicion of our guide crossed my brain. What if he should lead us once more to the brink of the cliff, and, true in his loyalty to the house he served, should cause us to perish, though the act should involve his own destruction. Such things had

been done, I knew, and he had proved himself to be a stubborn man. I threw the light upon his face.

"What is this?" I said harshly. "Are you playing us false, man?"

"No," he answered sullenly. "There should be a fountain here."

I bade the troopers keep behind me, and throwing the light upon the ground, moved slowly forwards, half expecting at each step to see some horrible abyss yawning at my feet. But nothing appeared until some fifty feet further I came once more to a gravel path, in the centre of which a white marble fountain loomed ghost-like through the fog. At a short distance from this stood a stone seat, its surface strewn with the petals of withered roses. I thrust the light back into the steward's hand, and he struck off into a broader walk than any we had as yet traversed and which ascended, by means of three or four stone steps, in a succession of terraces, until, when we had travelled fully a quarter of a mile from where we started, we came at last to a little stone bridge spanning a narrow moat. I held the lantern over this and the light shone upon the dark surface below, covered, for the most part, with a thick growth of waterweed. The bridge gave entrance to a broader terrace beyond, across which loomed the dark outline of the house. I bade them now put out the lantern; and we crossed the terrace and stood beneath the walls of the building. To left and right of where we were standing the house stretched into the fog, dark and silent. There

was something almost sinister in its gloomy aspect, matching well with the black night without.

Stay; a little to our right I thought that I could see a shaft of light, and it was towards this that the steward directed his steps. It came from a heavily curtained window and lay a mere slit upon the gravel surface of the terrace. At the top the curtains had fallen somewhat apart, disclosing nothing to our view, however, beyond a glimpse of the brightly illumined ceiling of the room. I halted and put my lips to the steward's ear. "What room is that?" I said softly.

"It is the dining hall," he whispered in reply. "The man you seek is there."

I noticed that the window was such as I had seen in France. It reached to the ground and opened upon the terrace. I left two troopers therefore to guard it, impressing them with the necessity of using the utmost vigilance. They took up their station one on either side, and we continued our way until the steward stopped at length before an arched doorway in the wall. I halted then, and waiting till a lull in the gale, raised my voice and gave the signal I had agreed upon with Cornet Graham. The melancholy cry went pealing into the night, and we stood in the darkness, straining our ears for a reply. But no answering cry came back to them, no sound from the silent house, save the patter of the rain upon the ivy-covered wall and the sobbing of the wind in its eaves and gables.

I waited no longer, therefore, but inserted the key in the lock before me. It was a massive door, nail-studded,

and it opened with a sullen creak as we quickly entered, carrying with us a breath of the fog and a shower of raindrops. We closed it quietly behind us, and so thick was its massive timber that the noise of the wind without came to our ears but faintly as from a distance. We stood in a narrow passage, giving place to a square, dimly lit hall, from which five or six doors opened. So far we had seen no one, but from a corridor on the right came the sound of voices with now and again a snatch of song.

I looked inquiringly at the steward.

"The servants' quarters," he whispered in return.

I signed to two or three of the men to take their stand at the head of this passage, and, with the others at my heels, crossed the hall to a door upon the left, from beneath which the light was shining. Then, sword in hand, I softly opened the door and we entered the room.

CHAPTER III

OF THE KING'S ERRAND AND MY LADY'S WELCOME

THE interior was brilliantly lighted by a number of wax candles set in sconces against the walls, their light reflected by a cunning arrangement of broad mirrors that hung upon the deep oak panelled surface behind them. Between these the light fell upon many a portrait of past earls of Cleeve, interspersed with arms of various countries and the trophies of the chase. Upon our right, three broad stairs, flanked on either side by a richly carved balustrade, led up to a little landing, on which, directly facing the steps, were a pair of folding doors. From this landing the stairway divided, ascending left and right to a gallery overhead, that ran along the whole length of that side of the hall. On our left were three or four heavily curtained windows. For the rest, the squares of bright-hued carpet lying on the polished oaken floor, the richness of the furniture and hangings, all bespoke the wealth of the owners, as the cut-glass bowls filled with the summer's flowers, the open spinet upon which some leaves of music were scattered, denoted unmistakably the presence of women—and women of refinement and taste.

All this I took in, as it were, at a glance ere fixing my eyes upon the two persons who occupied the room.

At the farther end, before a wide, stone chimney, in which a bright fire of logs was burning, a lady was seated in a high-backed chair, over which a tall man was leaning, conversing with her in low tones.

Their backs were towards us, and they did not move when I opened the door. Doubtless they thought it was some servant who entered. They were speedily undeceived.

"M. de Launay," I cried clearly, "I arrest you in the name of his Majesty, William III.!"

Had a cannon-ball fallen suddenly into the room, it could not have occasioned a greater surprise.

The lady started to her feet with a low cry of fear, and so stood, gazing at us with startled eyes. As for the gentleman, he turned to face us, his sword half drawn from its sheath. But a second glance must have convinced him of the futility of resistance, for he let his hand fall to his side again. He was a handsome man in the prime of life, and was dressed in the latest fashion of the French Court. His suit of white flowered satin and gold-embroidered vest became him wonderfully; his peruke was of the largest, his cravat and the ruffles at his wrist of the finest lace; and there was an air of graceful elegance about him which birth and breeding alone give. He bore the look of one who had spent his life in the society of great men.

For a few seconds there was silence in the room, broken only by the howl of the wind without and the lashing of the rain against the window.

"Who are you?" he demanded, when at length he found

his voice. He spoke English well enough, though with a somewhat foreign accent.

"Permit me to explain," I answered, turning to the lady, though still keeping a watchful eye upon the man before me. I now had leisure to observe her more closely. She was young, not more than twenty years of age, as I judged, and her gown of pink brocade served to display the slimness of her figure. A fair face, surrounded by its mass of flaxen curls, but one scarcely deserving the high praises that Cornet Graham had sung in my ears upon the road. As the thought of them recurred to me, I could barely repress a smile. I had seen many women more beautiful. "Do I address the Lady Lettice Ingram?" I said, doffing my hat.

"She is my sister," she replied slowly. Her eyes were still dark with fear. In a moment I was minded of the steward's words. I told myself that this was the Mistress Grace that he had mentioned.

"Madam," I made haste to answer, "I beg that you will not be alarmed at this intrusion, which the exigencies of my errand alone warranted. My business is with this gentleman," I continued, indicating the Frenchman, who stood, one white hand laid upon the hilt of his rapier. "M. de Launay, I am charged with your arrest by order of Sir Richard Danvers, governor of the west during his Majesty's absence in Ireland."

"Pest!" he said coolly. "But if I am not the person you mention. What if you have made a mistake, monsieur?"

"No mistake, M. le Marquis," I answered firmly, "as

I am about to prove to you. Be good enough to carry your memory back some three years, and I think that you cannot have forgotten one Armand de Brissac and a certain duel in the Crown Tavern at Barcelona!"

For a moment he stared at me, a look of profound astonishment on his face.

"De Brissac? The Maître D'Armés?" he cried quickly.

"On that occasion," I continued, "you staked somewhat heavily upon the issue and lost."

"To poor D'Epernay, who fell at Walcourt. Certainly I remember the circumstances. But you—how is it that you?—I do not understand." He looked at me more intently. "*Pardieu!*" he burst out, "I know you now! He was the finest swordsman in the French army, and you killed him in less than five minutes!"

I bowed low.

"That being the case, monsieur," I answered, "I think you will admit that I have made no mistake as to your identity."

"Readily," he replied lightly. "And your name, monsieur? It has escaped my memory."

"Adrian Cassilis," I answered, "at your service! Captain in his Majesty's Tangier Horse!"

"A famous regiment," he said. "I congratulate you! I have had the pleasure of fighting against them both in France and Flanders."

Again I bowed.

"Admitting then, M. Cassilis," he continued, "that I am the man you mention, may I be permitted to ask what

is your purpose concerning me, and where you would take me?"

"To Exeter," I answered, "in the first place."

"And afterwards?" he said quickly.

"Doubtless my Lord Danvers will himself inform you," I replied.

"You are discreet, monsieur!" he said, frowning. "At least you will not refuse to inform me with what offence I am charged?"

"All in good time, M. le Marquis," I answered, shrugging my shoulders. "Be patient, I beg of you. You have been a soldier yourself. My duty is but to secure your person."

"But, you have some idea!" he cried impatiently. "Is it not so? Be frank, man!"

"Possibly," I answered curtly. "With the Stuart in Ireland and a French army at Dunkirk, it needs no long head to discover a reason for depriving so distinguished a soldier as M. de Launay of his present liberty."

"Truly I should be flattered at my celebrity," he answered lightly. "But if the liberty of every one of my countrymen at present in England is for the same reason to be so curtailed, you will require to enlarge your prisons, monsieur!"

I was about to reply to this, when——

"What is the meaning of this outrage?"

The words fell clearly and suddenly upon my ears.

I turned in the direction from which the voice proceeded, and I saw that the folding doors beneath the

gallery were wide open, and that a woman stood at the head of the stair.

She stood at the head of the stairway, in the full light of the candles, and as my eyes rested upon her face, the dangers and hardships of our journey, nay, the very errand upon which we had come, and the presence of the man at my side, all faded away, and I saw nothing but the face of the woman before me, while in my ears rang the words of the cornet: "She is accounted by some to be the loveliest woman in England." And I knew that they had not lied.

She was clad in a grey velvet riding dress, that revealed every curve of her faultless figure, silhouetted as she was against the semi-darkness of the corridor behind. Upon the clustering golden hair that framed her face was set the daintiest of three-cornered riding hats. But how to describe her beauty I know not. Words are but poor things at best, and how can I, a plain soldier, depict with justice that upon which the painters and poets of Europe have lavished the finest efforts of their genius! This only will I say: That in the proud poise of the lovely head, upon the haughty, glowing face, with its rich colouring heightened by her recent ride, was stamped the pride of birth and conscious beauty.

Oh, she was beautiful! A woman for the sake of whom a man might give his life and count it less than naught. A woman to gain whose love a man might sell his soul!

"I am waiting, sir!" she cried impatiently, as speechless I stood before her, dazzled by her beauty. Her voice was rich, if a trifle imperious; her every movement

instinct with a womanly grace. Descending the steps, she stood facing me not ten paces distant. And I saw her eyes—eyes of a dusky, violet hue flash ominously as she took in the details of the scene. Doubtless, splashed with mud as we were from head to heel, our clothes sodden with the wet, our faces streaked with scratches where the brambles had torn us—we must have appeared like denizens of the Pit itself.

Her words recalled me to myself with a start.

"Madam," I stammered—and my voice sounded hoarse even to my own ears—"I crave your pardon for so intruding, but—That window is guarded, M. de Launay!" I broke off sharply.

He gave in at that.

"Pest!" he said with a shrug. "You think of everything, monsieur! I call you to witness, however, that I had given you no parole. Have you come out against me with an army?"

"I am too old a campaigner, monsieur," I replied curtly, "to leave aught to chance."

"Address yourself to me, sir!" my lady cried imperiously, "and in as few words as possible."

I turned to where she stood, one gauntletted hand daintily upholding her trailing skirt. In the other she carried a short riding whip.

"To be brief then, madam," I answered, "I am charged with an order for the arrest of M. de Launay."

"M. de Launay is my guest," she replied haughtily, "and were he King Louis himself I would not give him up!"

"Descending the steps, she stood facing me not ten paces distant"

Doubtless the smallness of our numbers encouraged her in the thought that her servants might offer us effectual resistance. If so, she was speedily undeceived. Even as she spoke there came the sound of many footsteps in the hall without, accompanied by the clank of steel, and Cornet Graham and his troop entered the room.

"It appears to me, madam," I said calmly, "that you have no option in the matter."

She looked at me for a moment as if she could not believe her ears—as if I were less than the dirt beneath her feet. So long had she been accustomed to have her slightest wish obeyed, that now to have her will disputed was an experience as novel as it was humiliating.

"You would use force, sir?" she cried incredulously.

"As to that, madam," I replied, "my answer is written behind me!" and I glanced significantly at the troopers.

"It is plainly written," she replied quickly, with a woman's ready wit. "Times are indeed changed," she continued bitterly, "when we of the house of Ingram must submit to the bidding of the first beggar who carries a sword at his side! But it seems that we must obey the ruling powers, with whom even our own servants are in league!"

At this I could readily believe there was no enviable time ahead of the steward and he must have thought so, too, for with a sudden effort he shook off the slackened grasp of the troopers on either side and stepped quickly forward.

"My lady," he cried, "what could I do? They would have hanged me!" and he pointed to his neck, round

which was a purple ring where the cord had cut into the flesh, plain to be seen by the dullest eyes, and the meaning of which could not be mistaken.

For a moment my lady gazed; then she drew herself to her full height and faced us, one hand pressed against her bosom, as if to restrain the passion that caused her figure to tremble and flashed from the depths of her wondrous eyes.

"And was this, sir," she cried, "this in your orders—that you should not only break into my house, but should also vent your savage cruelty upon my inoffensive servants?"

Again I stood speechless before her, for anger served only to increase her loveliness.

"Inoffensive? A damned rebel!" growled the sergeant.

I silenced him with a look and turned once more to the woman before me.

"Pooh! madam," I said coolly, for her words nettled me, "the man is not seriously hurt, and my duty must be my excuse."

"Your duty!" she cried with intense scorn. "You had not dared this outrage had my brother, the earl, been present!"

"But he is not, madam," I answered with a faint sneer. "I believe I am correct in saying that he is not even in England!"

"He is where every true and loyal gentleman should be," she cried boldly—"in Ireland, fighting for his rightful sovereign, King James!"

I heard a low gasp escape the troopers behind me.

It might have been astonishment or of admiration at her boldness.

"You are frank, madam," I replied, "and permit me to say it—somewhat indiscreet. But again I beg you to believe that the duty which thus forces me into your presence was as unsought by me as it is distasteful."

"I do not believe you," she said proudly. "And you may spare me your apologies, sir! There is never wanting an instrument base enough to execute any deed of injustice!"

Her words stung me.

"Very well, madam," I replied; "then there is nothing further to be said. M. de Launay," I continued, "I must trouble you for your sword. I regret that my leniency will not so far permit me to allow you to retain it, but give me your parole that you will attempt no escape upon the road and you shall ride with all freedom. Also," I added, "I should recommend you to bring your cloak, monsieur. The weather is inclement."

"But pardon, M. Cassilis," he broke out, as a sudden gust of wind shook the casements and sent the raindrops rattling on the glass, "you do not mean to ride to Exeter on such a night as this!"

"By no means," I answered. "But there is a good inn here, I am told. We shall be there to-night, monsieur, and start at daybreak."

"In that case," my lady cried, "he shall stay here to-night."

"That is as I choose, madam," I answered coldly, "and I do not choose."

I could see that to be checked, thwarted, made to feel of no account, here in the place where by virtue of her birth and beauty she had held undisputed sway, was galling to her pride beyond endurance. I could see it, I say, and I rejoiced in the knowledge.

"Your parole, monsieur!" I said once more, turning to the marquis.

"Since I have no choice in the matter," he answered testily, "you have it. On the honour of a De Launay!" he added proudly.

I bowed.

"That is sufficient, monsieur," I replied. "But pardon me," I continued lightly; "you say that you have no choice in the matter. On the contrary, there is another alternative. I am offering you the treatment of a gentleman; if you prefer it, however, you may go bound to a horse like any common felon."

He looked at me very sourly, but he did not speak. Instead, he unbuckled his sword and threw it with an ill grace upon the floor, and at a sign from me, a trooper stepped forward and picked it up. I glanced at my lady with, I doubt not, some of the triumph I felt showing in my eyes. I was so completely the master of the situation.

"Believe me, monsieur," I said, "I take but the precaution that my warrant enjoins. You may read it for yourself if you so desire."

"It is of no consequence," he answered with a wave of the hand.

"But it is of consequence to me, monsieur!" my lady

cried wrathfully. "I am the mistress of this house and the guardian of all pertaining to its honour. Show me this warrant, if indeed you have one!" she added, turning suddenly upon me.

I sheathed my sword, and with flushed face and trembling fingers I drew the paper from my breast and held it out to her. But she stepped backwards with such a look of proud disdain upon her lovely face that my hand dropped involuntarily to my side. For a moment she stood thus, searching my eyes and enjoying, perhaps, my confusion, for I saw that she would not take it from my hand; then she motioned to the steward who stood near.

"Give it to me!" she said proudly.

He took the paper from my hand and she opened it and glanced quickly at its contents.

On a sudden she broke into a bitter laugh.

"'By my authority,'" she said, reading. She looked up, her eyes aflame. "We are indeed fallen low when we must obey the authority of such men as my Lord Danvers!—of Sir Richard Danvers, drunkard and libertine! That is how I treat his authority!" She tore the paper across and across and flung the pieces at her feet. "And now begone, sir!" she continued, pointing imperiously to the door. "Begone! you and your red-coated rabble!"

For a moment I was too astounded to speak, but I heard a low murmur from the men behind me, and the sound recalled me to myself.

"Certainly I will be going, madam," I replied. "I

could no longer stay in a house where so little respect is paid to the king's authority. And I am not at all sure," I continued slowly, "that I should be exceeding my duty if I were to arrest you also!"

"Arrest me?"

The words sprang from her lips in a tone of blank amazement, then she drew her queenly figure erect and gazed at me with such a tempest of wrath and scorn in her eyes as no words of mine can picture, and I saw her breast heave with the passion she strove in vain to control. I could well believe that never previously in all her life had she been so addressed.

"Certainly!" I answered harshly. "You seem to forget, madam," I continued, pointing to the fragments of paper that lay between us, "that you have committed nothing short of treason in so destroying the king's warrant. But I have no time to waste further words upon you!" I added rudely; for I saw how I could hurt her pride.

"The king's authority!" she cried passionately. "The authority that sends such men as you to insult women! I would to God my servants had been present, for they should have flogged you, sir—flogged you from the village, and the ragged hirelings with you!"

I stood hand on hip not three paces from her, and I fixed my eyes insolently upon her lovely face.

"I do not doubt their willingness under your tuition, madam," I answered coolly, "but only their ability to do so; for," I continued slowly, as a coarse laugh broke from the men behind me, "if they are no better when it

comes to blows than King James, whom they serve, of whose courage we have lately had an example beneath the walls of Derry, there would be more about them of flight than fight!"

For a moment she gazed at me with panting breath and quivering nostrils; then moved by my words beyond restraint:

"You liar!" she cried, and throwing into the words all her concentrated anger, before I could guess her purpose she raised the riding whip in her hand and struck me heavily across the face.

To this day I take it to my credit that no oath escaped my lips. A thin trickle of blood ran down my cheek. But ere she could repeat the blow I caught her wrist and so stood facing her while one might count a score.

What she read in my own eyes I know not, but in the depths of hers I read impotent passion, scorn, and hate, but not a trace of fear.

I loosened her wrist—even in my pain its soft touch thrilled me—and I stepped backwards, wiping the warm blood from my face.

"Madam," I said very quietly, "one day I will repay you for that blow with tenfold interest!"

"Threats!" she answered scornfully, "and to a woman!"

I turned away.

"Monsieur," I said to the marquis, who had stood a silent spectator of the scene, and still speaking in the same level tones, "if you are ready to accompany us, we will set out."

"I am at your service," he answered, taking a cloak

from a chair in one corner of the room and wrapping himself in its folds. Then he advanced to the ladies to make his adieux.

"Farewell, madam," he said, bowing with courtly grace to my lady, and raising her hand to his lips.

"M. de Launay," she replied, "I can find no words to apologise for the insult offered you in this house."

"Madame," the marquis answered gallantly, "I beg that you will banish the episode from your memory."

"That is impossible," she said quickly. "That guest of ours should be so served, and to be powerless to prevent it! But say, rather, au revoir, monsieur," she continued, with kindling eyes, "for I, too, shall ride to Exeter to-morrow, and will myself interview Sir Richard Danvers on your behalf! We shall see whether the name of Ingram does not still possess weight sufficient to annul this outrage and to punish the perpetrators!" And she shot a scornful glance in my direction.

"Very good, madam," I answered, "only in that case I shall ride with you. I have no desire," I continued with a sneer, "that my Lord Danvers should hear anything but the truth."

"Then I pray you keep behind me, sir!" she replied haughtily. "I would not have you taken for lackey of mine!"

I made no reply to this. What reply could I make? Instead, I gave a sharp order and the troopers fell into place, the marquis in their midst. They filed through the open doorway with the clank of steel, and the tramp of their footsteps died away down the hall. I waited

until the last one had left the room and then prepared to follow.

Once as I crossed the threshold I looked back, and the light fell upon the tall figure of my lady, her sister at her side, then the door closed upon the room and its inmates, and passing quickly through the hall, in which a little crowd of scared servants had gathered, I went out into the night. Outside, at the foot of the steps leading to the main entrance, I found the troopers waiting, the light from the open doorway shining upon their horses, my own amongst the number.

I bade one of the men give up his mount to the marquis, and collecting the men I had stationed upon the terrace, I climbed into the saddle, and so for the first time I left Cleeve.

The fog had collected somewhat, though it was still very dark, and the brightly lighted room from which we had come rendered the blackness that surrounded us more opaque.

For myself I was content to resign the lead to Cornet Graham and to follow behind the others with only my thoughts for company. And if ever there was all hell in a man's heart, it was in mine that night.

For now that I was alone, now that I had no longer to keep up appearances, I gave way to the passion I had so far restrained. That I—I of all men, should be struck by a woman! And in public! As the thought of the men in front who had been witnesses of my disgrace recurred to me, I ground my teeth with anger and cursed this woman who had brought me to shame.

But bitterly, bitterly should she repent the blow! Oh, to hurt her! to humble her pride! to see her at my feet begging for mercy—and to refuse it! I gloated over the thought, and I swore in my heart that I would not spare her in the hour of my triumph one throb of the pain I was now enduring. She should drink the cup of my revenge to the bitterest dregs; and so taken up was I with these thoughts that it was not until I saw the lights in the windows of the houses on either side of me that I realised that we had reached the village.

I spurred forward then and overtook the troop in front. From the length of the street and the size of the houses I saw that the place was larger than I had been given to understand. Here and there, at the trampling of our horses' feet, windows were opened, and dark figures appeared in the doorways, or ran out, heedless of the falling rain, into the street. But the sight of the troopers' swarthy faces and of the hated uniform they wore drove them swiftly indoors again. For though it was June of the year 1690, and Dutch William had now been two years upon the throne, yet so great was the terror which the "Tangier devils" had inspired throughout the West, both in friend and foe alike, at the time of Monmouth's ill-fated rebellion, that Catholics though the villagers were, they knew by past experience that these very troopers who had fought for James at Sedgemoor and elsewhere were now equally ready to plunder them as Papists and Jacobites in the name of William; and behind their barred doors there was many a one, I wot, that night

who trembled for the loss of such goods as he possessed and for the safety of his women folk.

At the end of the street the cornet turned sharply to the right and entered a square courtyard, at the opposite side of which stood an old-fashioned inn.

A blaze of light came from its windows, through one of which could be distinguished the dark figures of the troopers of De Brito's party. We drew rein before the door, and almost ere we could dismount the landlord stood upon the steps.

"Welcome, gentlemen," he said, bowing. "What is your pleasure?"

He was a round-faced, portly man, with an air somewhat above that of the keeper of a country inn. There was a nameless something about him that told me he had at one time been a soldier.

"You can find room for us to-night, I suppose?" I answered.

"Well," he replied slowly, "my rooms are small, but if a couple of lofts——"

"That will do for us," the sergeant said gruffly. "Better a board than six feet of earth on such a night."

"Aye, and good liquor in plenty to soften it," cried a trooper, and the men laughed.

"You shall find no complaint with that, I promise you," said the landlord. "There are wines to suit all tastes, and as for my cider, 'tis second to none in all Devonshire."

"To the devil with your cider!" said a trooper roughly. "Give us brandy, hot, and of the best, if you would

keep this hen coop from being burned round your ears!"

"And a pretty wench to serve it!" cried another.

"As you please, gentlemen! As you please!" the landlord hastened to say. "None should know better than I how to treat you. I have cognac here—the best out of France. But come inside, gentlemen, and my men shall look to your horses." He turned and led the way indoors.

In a square, stone-paved room on the right of the passage we found De Brito's troopers, a plentiful supply of ale upon the low tables before them, who greeted their comrades with boisterous shouts of welcome.

"Would it not be advisable, monsieur, to seek another apartment?" said M. de Launay. "Your men are gallant fellows, but save on the field of battle, I prefer them at a distance."

"By all means," I answered. "You have another room?" I said, turning to the landlord.

"This way," he replied, leading me, closely followed by Cornet Graham and the marquis, down a narrow, low-ceilinged passage.

"You have seen service yourself?" I said sharply.

"Aye, years ago," he replied briefly. "I fought for the Swede."

He stopped before a door upon the left, and with many apologies for his lack of space, ushered us into what proved to be the kitchen of the inn. It was a large room well stocked with articles pertaining to its character. Here a row of brightly polished pans, there a

score of reeves of onions, while from a hook in one corner hung a well-cured ham.

Before a great fire of logs De Brito was sitting, a leather flask and tankard upon a table at his side, to the former of which I saw he had been paying liberal attention. He looked up as we entered.

"So you've come at last," he said thickly. "Landlord, bring glasses for these gentlemen, and more brandy. What the devil!" he broke off suddenly, catching sight of my face. "Did the dove turn out to be a hawk, after all? Well, she has not marred your beauty!" and he laughed insolently.

But I could brook no more.

All the passion that was smouldering in my heart flashed into sudden flame.

"Curse you!" I cried, and I caught the tankard from the table and flung the contents in his face; then, drawing my sword, I placed myself on guard.

He dashed the liquor from his eyes (it had been half full of the raw spirit) and sprang to his feet with a furious oath.

But he had reckoned without his cost. Even as he snatched his blade from the table where he had laid it the fumes of the brandy that he had been drinking heavily mounted to his brain. He staggered forward, his knees gave way under him, and he fell to the floor, where he lay, unable to rise.

I sheathed my sword, and turning on my heel, left the room. In the passage I encountered the landlord returning, a tray of glasses in his hand. He readily agreed

to my request to be shown some chamber where I could sleep, and lighting a candle, he led me up a narrow flight of stairs and stopped before a door upon the landing.

"It is small," he said doubtfully, entering the room, "and there is but room for one."

"So much the better," I answered, for I wished to be alone with my thoughts. I took the candle from his hand, therefore, and with a few directions as to the disposal of M. de Launay and upon other matters, I bade him "good-night."

I stood for a moment at the open door. From the troopers below came a confused babel of oaths and laughter, mingled with the clatter of cups. Then, closing the door and shooting the bolt behind me, I pulled off my coat and heavy riding boots and threw myself, dressed as I was, upon the couch. And there for hours I lay, planning my great revenge, whilst ever before my eyes was my lady's proud face as I had last seen it, alight with scorn. It was far into the night and the noises from the rooms below had long since died away when I finally dropped into the sleep of utter exhaustion.

CHAPTER IV

OF MY LADY'S MISSION TO EXETER

The first streaks of dawn were lightening the chamber when I awoke to a consciousness of my surroundings. I sprang from my couch with faculties alert, for I am, as a rule, but a light sleeper. It is a legacy that, with others, has been bequeathed to me by many a campaign in foreign lands, when often a man's life might hang upon the sharpness of his wits and his power of decision at a moment's notice under any circumstances.

I crossed the room to the window and looked out through its tiny latticed panes.

Mist, mist everywhere, and so thick that I could barely distinguish the courtyard of the inn below.

Ere donning my coat and boots I made shift to cleanse them in so far as possible from the mud stains of the previous day and to make such poor means of a toilet as the room afforded. It was in doing this that I accidentally caught sight of myself in a little square of cracked glass that hung upon the wall beside the window.

Across my brow ran a purple weal, terminating in a great bruise of black and yellow, where my lady's whip had fallen, and at sight of the discoloured flesh my rage against her broke out anew.

I buckled on my sword with a grim smile. She had yet to learn whether she could beat me like a hound with

impunity. Downstairs in the hall I found the landlord already up, who greeted me with a cheery "good-morning."

I questioned him closely as to the road, and found, as I expected, that the one running down the valley was the direct road to Exeter, which lay to the north, some thirty miles distant.

On my inquiring further for Cornet Graham, he led me once more to the kitchen. Upon one side of the open fireplace I found the cornet asleep in an old-fashioned, leather-covered chair. On a table near, a pack of greasy cards and a couple of empty wine flasks betokened the means that he and the marquis had taken to while away some portion of the night, and testified to the good fellowship existing between them. It was not without difficulty that I awoke the cornet sufficiently to understand my orders. For the fatigues of the previous day, combined with the effects of the potations he had freely imbibed, still lay heavily upon his brain.

He sat up at last, his eyes dull and heavy with sleep. I explained briefly to him my intentions, and bade him follow with as little loss of time as possible, and I then drew a chair to the table and sat down to a light meal that the landlord speedily laid out for me.

My hunger satisfied, I rose from my seat and bade him show me where my horse was stalled.

He hesitated for a moment.

"But my bill!" he said slowly.

"As to that," I answered, "we ride upon the king's service, so you would do well to present it to my Lord

Danvers, at Exeter. You do not think that I shall pay it, man!" I cried sharply, as he still hesitated. And I smiled to myself at the thought of the few broad pieces remaining in my pocket.

"For that matter," I continued significantly, "be content that you possess a whole skin to-day. It is more than others of your trade have lived to boast of. And now, my horse!"

He muttered something under his breath, and turning on his heel, led the way down the passage. As we passed the main room of the inn I glanced through the open door.

The tables were overturned and I saw the bodies of three, at least, of the troopers still lying upon the floor, amid a litter of broken glass, in a drunken slumber. The room and passage reeked vilely with tobacco, so that it was a relief to step out into the courtyard and breathe the cool morning air.

The landlord crossed the yard, and at his call a sleepy hostler came yawning from one of the stables. It was but the work of a minute to slip the saddle upon the back of my horse, and then I mounted, and with a final wave of the hand rode out of the inn.

Once the village was behind me, I broke into a canter, and the cool morning breeze, redolent of the sea, sang past my ears. The birds were waking in the hedgerows, filling the summer morning with their harmony; a little stream by the wayside rippled merrily amongst the pebbles, and every leaf and flower, sparkling with the night's rain, reared their heads joyously to greet the first

rays of the sun as they struggled through the mist, which had so far dispelled that I could plainly distinguish objects fifty feet distant.

There was a peacefulness brooding upon the country, a restful repose in the quiet air, to which, fresh from the narrow streets and reeking kennels of London, I had long been a stranger. I became absorbed in the contemplation of the unwonted sights around me, until a sudden throb of pain across my brow recalled me to myself and I fell to taking council of the anger in my heart.

I had ridden thus for some half mile, the roadway slightly ascending, before I came on my right to the gates leading to Cleeve Manor. They were wide open and were supported on either side by massive pillars, surmounted by a pair of couchant lions carved in stone, and beneath these the arms of the Ingram family.

Within the gates a broad avenue, flanked on either side by majestic oaks and beeches, stretched away into the mist.

I drew rein at the entrance, and there I was fain to wait, for I did not consider it likely that my lady had yet set out, and I had determined that I would not again approach the house in my present state, to become a mark for the prying eyes of every serving wench.

It may have been the half of an hour that I waited thus, when the sound of hoofs ringing on the gravel surface of the avenue broke on my ear, and a minute later the horses and their riders came into sight. There were four in all of the latter.

In front, mounted upon the chestnut mare I had last

seen in the stable, rode my lady. She was dressed in the same grey-velvet costume she had worn the night previous and her face was partially concealed by a riding mask of black silk. At her side rode the steward, a loose scarf around his neck. But my eyes were fixed upon the third member of the party, and there remained. He was, I think, the biggest man that I have ever seen. Mounted though he was, the massiveness of his head and build and the breadth of his shoulders all bespoke a man far above the ordinary proportions. Seen through the veil of mist, horse and man appeared gigantic. As for the other member of the party riding by his side, he was little more than a youth, and might have been a groom or under stable hand.

I reined my horse to one side of the gateway, at the same time pressing my hat upon my brow, for I was not desirous that my lady should see her handiwork. Yet even then, so great is the force of habit, that when she had arrived opposite me my hand went instinctively to the brim, but recollecting myself in time, I bowed low in my saddle instead.

But she did not look at me.

With head erect, she passed me by, her servants at her heels, and set off down the road at a brisk canter.

I fell into place about a dozen yards behind, and I now had leisure to scan them more closely.

I saw that the three men were fully armed, not only with a brace of pistols in their holsters, but also that each one carried a serviceable looking rapier at his side.

I noticed, too, that my lady sat her steed with the

grace and ease of a born horsewoman. From time to time she conversed shortly with the steward at her side, but she never turned her head, and I suppose that she had given her orders to the men behind her, for the whole party rode without taking any notice as to whether I followed or not. We had ridden thus for a distance of some five miles, when my lady turned sharply to the left along a narrow track running between the torrs. For a moment I drew rein at the entrance, and I confess I hesitated. The way was but wide enough to admit of riding in single file, and I would have wished to have had Cornet Graham and the troopers at my heels. But in a moment I pulled myself together. After all, what had I to fear, or what benefit would it be to M. de Launay should they see fit to attack me? Tush! that I, the best sword in the low countries, should be afraid of three assailants, even though one proved to be a giant.

I loosened my sword in its sheath, saw that my pistols were to my hand, and spurred after the party in front. They should not find me unprepared if it came to blows.

On either side of the track rose the bare hillside, shutting out the view of what lay beyond. A more desolate path, extending as it did for more than a mile, could hardly be imagined. But my lady held on her way without faltering, and presently the track came out upon the road again, and I saw that we had but taken a short cut, and so saved ourselves several miles.

Of the rest of our journey to Exeter one incident only stands out in my memory. It was at noon, and the mist had long since vanished from the face of the country,

giving place to a sky of cloudless blue and the shimmering heat of the midday sun. We had reached a little village, the name of which I have long since forgotten, and halted at the quaint, old-fashioned inn, above the doorway of which ran an inscription informing the world that it was built by one Robert Havell in the year 1542, "Who mayde a journie to London." Doubtless no mean undertaking in those days.

And here my lady dismounted and entered the one parlour the inn could boast of. But as for me, I was content to seat myself upon a bench against the wall without, where I could keep an eye upon her servants, for I thought it not unlikely that they might tamper with my horse, to which a youth was now attending. If they had any such intention in their minds, however, my resolute attitude and the sight of the pistols I had placed ostentatiously at my side must have deterred them from making the attempt, for they seated themselves at some little distance and fell to upon the food which the landlord presently placed before us, occasionally varying this performance by staring at me, the steward with menacing hate, and the big man with a lowering gaze that showed me how willingly they would have attempted to have rid themselves of me but for my lady's presence.

It was to the latter of the two men that the landlord paid most attention, waiting upon him with a deference that his station seemed scarcely to warrant. Accordingly, when I had finished, I rose from my seat, and beckoning the landlord on one side, demanded who the man was.

He looked at me in undisguised astonishment.

"What?" he cried. "You do not know him? I thought that every one knew Sampson Dare!"

I knew the man then. It was a name to conjure with throughout all Devon. For this was the champion wrestler of the West, whose fame had reached even as far as London itself, where he had twice appeared to show his skill before the late king, and accounted generally to be the strongest man in England. I knew, also, that should ever I come to close quarters with such a man my strength would be of as little more value to me than that of a child.

Presently my lady came forth again, and the horses were led round to the door, and here it was that the incident I have mentioned occurred.

In mounting my steed I had the misfortune to loosen my hat, which fell off and rolled at the others' feet.

"My hat, fellow," I cried sharply to the youth whom I had taken to be a groom, and who was nearest to it.

He looked at me for a moment, but he did not offer to stoop.

"I am not your man," he answered insolently. "Pick it up for yourself. You will need it to shield your face," he added with a grin.

I flung a curse at him, but there was no other help for it but to do as he said, for the landlord had gone indoors. I was compelled to dismount, therefore, and it needed but the light contemptuous laugh that came from my lady's lips to inflame afresh my anger against her, which grew

steadily with every hour that we rode beneath the burning summer sun.

We crossed the Teign above Newton Abbott, and continued our way by means of the old Roman Road up the beautiful valley of the Exe. The sun was low down in the west and the shadows were lengthening on the grass when the massive towers of the cathedral at Exeter came into sight, and beneath them the smoke cloud that hung above the city in the still evening air. We crossed the bridge over the river and entered the gates, and at the commencement of the High Street I left the others to ride forward, and turning my horse into a side thoroughfare, made my way along the less crowded streets to a large house standing in a quiet square not far distant from the cathedral, for I knew that it was here, if anywhere, that I should find my Lord Danvers. The house itself was inhabited by one Mistress Maddon, who had at one time been upon the stage, but who, having married from thence a wealthy merchant of the city of London, had in the course of a few years reduced him to the verge of ruin by her extravagance. Upon this she had fled incontinently with Sir Richard Danvers, and had come to Exeter two years previously, where she flaunted it before the town, to the no small scandal of the city dignitaries and their ladies. Nay, the scandal was notorious throughout the West.

I dismounted before the house, and flinging my reins to a beggar loitering near, ascended the steps.

The door was opened by a gorgeously dressed lackey in a livery of scarlet.

"Sir Richard Danvers is here?" I said sharply.

He stared superciliously at my travel-stained appearance.

"My lord is indeed present," he replied loftily, "but his hours for transacting business are over for the day." And he made as though to shut the door in my face.

But I was too quick for him. With a thrust of my foot I sent it open again and stepped quickly past him into the hall.

"Not so fast," I said coolly. "My business is too urgent to admit of further delay, and you can so tell your master."

He looked at me for a moment with an air of outraged dignity.

"Impossible that you can be admitted," he said stiffly. "His lordship is dining."

"Nevertheless, I must see him," I answered grimly. "And I am on the king's service, my friend. It occurs to me, therefore, that you will do well to announce me without further waste of time if you would save yourself present trouble."

I suppose that there was a look in my eyes that showed him I was not a man to be trifled with, for without more ado he noiselessly crossed the hall and ushered me into a richly furnished room, where he left me to my own devices.

I have said that the apartment was richly furnished, but a second scrutiny convinced me of the error of my first impression. The light of the setting sun flaming through the windows fell upon the heavy gilt furniture

and mirrors, the Oriental carpets and hangings, serving but to increase their appearance of general gaudiness. There was that, indeed, about the whole which bespoke a certain amount of wealth, but of wealth coupled with ill taste. I contrasted the room with that other one at Cleeve which I had so lately left, and it was to the latter's distinct advantage. For the rest, opposite me was a door, half concealed by a thick curtain, and near the hearth stood a small table littered with papers, and upon which lay a man's hat and riding gloves. It may have been ten minutes that I waited thus impatiently, keeping an eye upon the street without, ere the door behind me opened and a woman entered the room.

It needed but a glance to assure me that this was the Mistress Maddon, and she was well in keeping, both in dress and appearance, with her surroundings.

Doubtless she had at one time been handsome in a bold, masculine way, but she was now past her prime, and the resources of art could not conceal the ravages of time. Nay, if anything, they tended rather to increse them. On a sudden a vision of my lady rose before my eyes, and I gazed on the smirking, beruddled face of the woman before me with a sense of deepening disgust.

She was the first to break the silence.

"You wish to see Sir Richard Danvers?" she said, advancing.

"Such is my desire, madam," I answered, bowing.

"And one which I fear cannot be gratified," she replied, "for 'tis his Lordship's invariable custom to sleep after dining."

In spite of her smooth words, I was not satisfied, for my eyes, travelling past her, happened to rest upon the curtain which covered the other doorway, and I saw it move.

Decidedly, the door behind it had been opened. Accordingly I raised my voice.

"Then I pray you to awake him, madam," I answered, "for the business I have to discharge is urgent."

"What is your business?" she said sharply.

"Madam," I answered coolly, "I regret that it is for his ears alone."

She bit her lip with vexation.

"Or, to be plain, sir," she replied, "you will not tell me?" and she tapped her foot impatiently upon the floor.

"If you so put it, madam," I said bluntly.

She looked at me with a gathering frown. "You need not fear to trust me, sir," she answered quickly. "My lord has no secrets that I do not share."

"But I am not his lordship," I retorted with a faint sneer. "Therefore I pray you to hold me excused, especially as it is connected with affairs of state."

"Oh, 'tis upon a matter of state you come?" she cried in a surprised tone.

"If a document signed by the Privy Council itself can be rightly so termed, madam," I answered dryly.

"Then you are not Colonel Overton?" she said hastily.

I looked at her in unfeigned astonishment. I suppose she saw the answer written on my face.

"Ah, I see that you are not," she added.

"I am certainly not Colonel Overton," I replied, at a loss for her meaning.

"Nor come on his behalf?" she persisted.

"So little, madam," I answered, "that I do not even know the name of the gentleman you mention."

To my surprise she gave a short laugh.

"Had you given us your name and the nature of your business at first, sir, you might have saved yourself this delay," she said abruptly. Then raising her voice:

"You can come in, my lord," she cried. "It is not Colonel Overton."

At this the curtain was drawn aside, and a man whom I recognised from description to be Sir Richard Danvers himself entered the room. I looked at him with some curiosity. There was little remaining of the grace of manner and personal beauty that in his younger days had made him a companion of the gay and witty Charles II. of that name, as his total unscrupulousness had equally endeared him to the late king. In age he was at this time nearing fifty, and his clean-shaven face bore the traces of a career of dissipation. His cravat was loosened, and I noticed the stain of wine upon his velvet coat.

He came forward with a somewhat shamefaced air.

"Curse me!" he cried, "I am glad of it. It would seem that there is some mistake. I owe you a thousand apologies, sir, for keeping you waiting. 'Tis the fault of the blockhead who admitted you. I took you for a gentleman to whom I lost somewhat heavily at cards last evening. You will understand it is not always con-

venient to pay. But I do not think that I have your name?"

"I am Captain Cassilis, of the Tangier Horse," I answered.

He looked at me, frowning; then, with a sudden interest in his heavy eyes:

"Cassilis? Cassilis, the swordsman?" he cried.

I bowed low in acknowledgment. It seemed that my reputation had preceded me.

"If you will remember, my lord," I continued, "I was charged yesterday with the arrest of the Marquis de Launay, at Cleeve."

"I did indeed sign a document to that effect," he replied, "but I was unaware that you were the officer to whom the task was entrusted."

He drew a chair to the table, scattering the papers from the latter with a sweep of his hand.

"Proceed, sir," he continued brusquely. "You succeeded in arresting this gentleman?"

"He should be in Exeter to-night, my lord," I answered; "and——"

"One moment, captain," he interrupted. "Pardon me my forgetfulness. You have had a long ride and a dusty one. Let us have wine, Nell, for talking is cursedly thirsty work, and of business, thirstier!"

"Not for me, my lord," I said hastily; "my errand——"

"Can wait," he answered. "Tush, man! You will talk all the readier. I have wine here that would unloose any tongue." And he threw himself back in his chair.

I cursed him inwardly for the delay, for at this moment

I distinctly caught the faint clatter of horses' hoofs in the street below. I was obliged to wait, however, until the woman had brought a bottle and glasses from a carved oaken cabinet and placed them upon the table before him. My lord filled the glasses with a slightly trembling hand.

"Ha!" he said, "this is wine of the best, captain. None of your light French wines, this! I bought it of Rochester himself. And damn me! I should know a good wine when I see one. None better."

I looked at the face of the man before me, and in my own mind I fully coincided with his opinion.

"I drink to the success of your mission, sir," he continued.

"With all my heart," I answered.

He drained his glass at a draught, but as for me, I was content to be more moderate, for the wine was of the strongest.

"And now to your tale, captain," he said, refilling his glass.

I waited no longer, but plunged briefly into a recital of the events of the previous day, omitting only that portion that related to the bruise upon my forehead. Once Mistress Maddon interrupted me.

"And this Lady Ingram," she said contemptuously, "you have seen her? Is she as beautiful as they say?"

"She is very beautiful, madam," I answered quietly.

Despite my hatred of her, I could be no less than candid. Once, too, when I came to the account of how she had served the royal warrant, my lord swore a great oath

and half rose from his seat; but he sank back again and did not interrupt me. In the momentary silence that followed the conclusion of my story I caught the sound of voices in the hall without; nay, I even thought that I could distinguish my lady's imperious tones.

Suddenly my lord leaned forward.

"But there was resistance?" he said, scanning my face.

I felt my brow burn.

"Nothing of any consequence, my lord," I answered carelessly.

"Ha!" he cried; "I have been too lenient hitherto. And here—here," he continued, taking a paper from the table before him, "is an order from the Council urging more stringent measures. Should James succeed in Ireland, Louis will land an army on the coast—'tis more than likely here, in Devon. Tourville, with the French fleet, is in the channel. Parliament is distracted. Spies everywhere. Burn me!" he cried with sudden rage, "they shall not complain of my remissness, and I will begin here. I would that I had to deal with this woman!"

"In that case, my lord," I said, "your wish may be speedily gratified, for Lady Ingram is herself in Exeter for the express purpose of waiting upon your lordship."

"Say you so?" he replied with an ugly frown. "Then I will see her. And curse me! she shall have cause to remember it."

"But not here," Mistress Maddon cried suddenly. "Let her carry her complaints elsewhere—to London, if she pleases! She shall not come here!"

"Shall not?" my lord cried angrily. "She shall come here, or elsewhere, as I choose, madam! Remember, I am master of this house—and what you are!" he added brutally.

"You do well to remind me of that," she answered bitterly; "but she does not enter whilst I am here."

"What, jealous?" my lord cried sneeringly. "Sink me! 'tis a good jest that. The little Maddon jealous!" And he laughed coarsely.

"I have so much reason to be jealous, have I not?" the woman answered contemptuously. "Nevertheless," she continued, "this fine madam shall not enter the house."

I caught the sound of footsteps in the hall.

"Then I fear in that case, madam, that you are too late," I said quickly.

She turned to me in sudden surprise.

"Too late? And why, sir?" she cried.

"Too late, madam," I answered firmly, "for I think that the answer is here."

Even as I spoke the door was thrown wide open and my lady stood upon the threshold.

It was my lady, still wearing her riding mask. Over her shoulder I caught a glimpse of the lackey's scared face.

For a moment she stood in the doorway, and I saw her slightly start as her eyes encountered mine; evidently she had not expected my presence. Then she entered the room.

It would be hard to say whether my lord or Mistress Maddon was the more surprised at her appearance.

Nevertheless, it was the woman who first recovered herself.

"This is an unexpected honour, madam," she said, advancing. "The business must surely be urgent that brings your ladyship as far as Exeter on such a day!"

My lady stepped back, drawing her skirts together with a slight gesture of repulsion as cruel as it was intentional. I saw that she was fully acquainted with the scandal attached to this woman's name.

"The business must indeed be urgent that brings me here," she answered scornfully.

"Where you come a self-invited guest," Mistress Maddon replied quickly. "But of course your ladyship has been to Court, and doubtless you have been taught manners which less favoured persons cannot hope to imitate."

"Including even a sense of shame," my lady answered icily.

I saw the woman before her redden beneath her rouge.

"Indeed!" she retorted sneeringly. "But perhaps your ladyship needed to be instructed in the lesson. It does not come readily to every one of our sex."

"To some, never," my lady replied in the same icy tone, and I saw her eyes flash behind her mask. "But I have had so little experience of how to treat such women!"

"Oh," Mistress Maddon cried, "you have a keen wit, madam, have you not? 'Tis a pleasure to converse with you. Will your ladyship condescend to be seated?"

"I prefer to stand," my lady replied haughtily. She turned to the man, who still sat silent at the table.

"Sir Richard Danvers," she cried, "I presume you have already heard from the lips of this gentleman a version of the story that brings me to Exeter?" and she shot a glance replete with scorn at where I stood. "I demand to know," she continued proudly, "by what right do you arrest a guest residing in my house?"

Her words aroused my lord.

"And I demand, madam, that you remove your mask!" he replied.

My lady drew herself erect.

"Is this necessary, sir?" she said coldly.

"If we are to continue the conversation, madam," my lord answered, "I prefer that it should be face to face."

"Or if you have scruples, madam," Mistress Maddon, who was standing near to the window, cried suddenly, "I notice that your ladyship's servants grow impatient."

With a sudden passionate gesture my lady tore the riding mask from her face and flung it from her.

"Are you satisfied, sir?" she cried with flashing eyes, in the depths of which I read all the scorn of her surroundings, all the loathing of the people in whose presence she was. And as I gazed at where she stood, with the dying sunlight falling on her graceful figure and turning the masses of her hair to burnished gold, surely, I told myself, never had I seen so fearless a lady nor so fair a face.

And could there be a greater contrast than that afforded by the two women before me? The one so proud and pure, so rich in all the noblest qualities endowing womanhood, the other with the glamour of passion long since

decayed, leaving but the barren husk of sin in its train.

I glanced at my lord. As he gazed upon her beauty, into his eyes there crept a look such as I had seen upon men's faces before.

"Of what measure of truth there was in the story told you I do not seek to learn," my lady continued proudly. "But I demand the immediate release of M. de Launay as the least reparation you can offer for the outrage committed by this man, whose very presence in my house was an insult, and was resented by me as such."

Unconsciously I raised my hand to my forehead, but my lady's quick eyes noted the movement, for she turned upon me suddenly and added: "And I think, sir, that you will not easily conceal the mark of my resentment."

"I stood before her and I was dumb. That she should mock me—and before strangers. How I hated her in that moment! I was about to stammer something in reply when my lord sprang to his feet and struck the table before him with his clenched hand.

"Demand? Reparation?" he cried, with sudden passion. "By G——, madam, you go too far! But I shall know how to deal with you—as I have the authority." And he snatched the paper he had previously shown me from the table.

"Have a care, my lord," Mistress Maddon cried maliciously. "Remember the fate of the other document. It would seem that her ladyship has a predeliction for destroying that which does not belong to her."

"Ha! you are right, Nell," my lord cried, his brow

black with passion. "You defy the king's authority, do you, madam?" he continued, "and beat the king's officers? Well, 'tis known to us that your part of the county is disaffected, that your house is a centre for Jacobite meetings and a harbourage for their agents. Were it not for urgent affairs here I would visit you myself. As that is impossible, I will tell you what I will do, madam. I will send such a force to Cleeve as shall effectually quench all sparks of rebellion there. Aye, and I will find the right man to set over it to deal with you."

"And the very man you desire is here—here to your hand!" and Mistress Maddon pointed full at me with her fan.

As I thought of all the possibilities her words carried, of the opportunities of repaying to my lady the shame I had suffered at her hands, my heart beat more rapidly and the breath came quicker from my lips. Here was revenge, indeed!"

"Sink me!" my lord cried, "but you are a clever one, Nell. Captain Cassilis, you have no cause to love this lady. What say you? Will you be this man? You shall have full power over their lives—and bodies!" he added with a leer.

"That I accept, my lord," I cried quickly. "And I will answer for it," I continued between my set teeth and with a glance of triumph at my lady, "that your lordship shall have no trouble there whilst I am in command!"

"I am well assured of it," he replied, with a short laugh.

"And I—I will appeal against this outrage," my lady cried quickly.

"Appeal to the—queen, an you will, madam," he answered rudely. "Though, distracted as she is with fears for her husband's safety in Ireland, I scarcely think that she will interfere on behalf of those who are his active enemies. To the Council! Proclaim yourself a Papist and see what consideration you will meet with at their hands. No, no, I give you credit for more sense, madam," he continued; "and I trust that you will take this lesson to heart."

"And *I* trust," Mistress Maddon cried ironically, "that your ladyship has suffered no hurt through entering this house! Perhaps for the future, my lady, you will learn a little more experience of how to treat '*such women!*' "

And she swept her a mocking curtesy.

My lady was beaten, and she knew it.

In that moment I could almost have found it in my heart to pity her. Yet she spoke no word.

For a moment, indeed, she stood gazing at the woman before her with a look of unutterable scorn, then she turned upon her heel.

I sprang to the door and flung it wide. "Permit me to be your lackey, madam, for this occasion," I cried sneeringly, "until I can appear as *your master*—at Cleeve!"

CHAPTER V

OF HOW THREE GENTLEMEN OF DEVON DRANK THE KING'S HEALTH

An hour later, when I left the house, I carried in my breast a sealed document giving me the fullest powers of acting, both in Cleeve and the surrounding district, against "all Papists and adherents of the man James Stuart; being enemies of his Majesty, King William, and of the peace of this realm." Moreover, I had received an order from my lord upon the treasury—which had been duly paid me by his secretary—that had lined my pockets with gold pieces, to defray all such disbursements as should be necessary to bring M. de Launay to London. For the express orders of the Privy Council were that the marquis should be treated with all courtesy until such time as he should be delivered into the custody of the governor of the Tower, that grim and ill-omened fortress, at present crowded with the partisans, real or suspected, of the base and despicable James; amongst the most noteworthy of whom were the Earl of Shrewsbury and the Queen's uncle, Clarendon.

Also I carried a letter from his lordship to the Earl of Nottingham, Secretary of State, praying him to send a regiment or two into Devonshire; for with the exception of the Tangier Horse there were no regular troops nearer to Exeter than Bristol or Plymouth. And even

now, in consequence of a riot arising out of a drunken brawl, my lord had been compelled, at the urgent demands of the most influential citizens, to send the regiment out of the city; whence they had marched the day before as far as Exmouth, so great was the fear inspired by their licentiousness.

I saw, therefore, that I should have little more assistance to rely on than that of my own troop—amounting in all to sixty men—which still lay in De Brito's charge at Cleeve. And with this force I had to overawe the district and patrol the coast from Start Bay to Teignmouth.

Accordingly, armed with this commission for the present, and with the prospect of revenge upon my lady in the near future, I rode slowly through a network of narrow alleys to the Castle and Falcon, a respectable hostelry in the High Street; for it was here that I had told Cornet Graham to look for me.

It was not, however, until fully two hours later that I heard the tramping of horse in the street without.

I made my way to the door and found the landlord already upon the steps, the landlady, a buxom woman, at his side.

It was, indeed, the cornet and his prisoner. Behind them came an escort of six troopers. The whole party dismounted before the inn.

"Ha, M. Cassilis!" the marquis cried, catching sight of me, "confess that you were growing anxious! Did you not think that I had knocked my estimable guard upon the head?"

"When I had your word of honour, M. de Launay?" I said. smiling. "But I fear you have had but a weary journey."

"By no means," he answered lightly. "I have been admiring your Devon scenery, which is only excelled," he added gallantly, "by the beauty of its women!"

And he made a bow to the pretty landlady, who smiled and blushed in return, worthy of the Court of the Grand Monarque from whence he came.

I could see that the cornet was burning with curiosity to hear my story; but it was not until we had fully supped that the marquis rose to his feet.

"If I have your permission, gentlemen," he said, bowing, "I think that I will retire."

"So soon, monsieur?" the cornet cried. "The night is young yet. Will you not take your revenge for your losses of yesterday?"

"I beg that you will hold me excused," he answered, with a deprecating gesture. "I am feeling somewhat fatigued, and there is a long journey ahead. I should prefer, therefore, to seek my couch, if my good friend the host will conduct me hither!" And with a courteous bow he left the room.

When the door had closed upon him I drew my chair again to the table and gave the cornet an account of what had passed in my interview with Sir Richard Danvers. He listened throughout in silence.

Only when I had finished: "What a woman!" he said admiringly.

I knew of whom he spoke.

Suddenly he reached out his hand and raised his glass. "I will give you a toast, captain," he cried. "To the health of Lady Ingram!"

"Aye," I answered grimly; following his example, "to the next meeting between us!"

Our arrival in London excited little curiosity, so common at this time was the sight of a suspected Jacobite being taken to Newgate or the Tower. In the city itself we found the wildest rumours afloat. William had been totally defeated in Ireland! Tourville with the French fleet had entered the Thames! Whilst at the first sound of his guns the Papists were to rise and commence a general massacre!

These and a hundred other reports equally alarming were greedily swallowed by the panic-stricken citizens. It was not without real regret at parting with the marquis that we arrived at length at the gate of the Tower facing Tower Hill; for throughout the journey he had proved a most entertaining companion. And though his air of assumed gaiety did not deceive me as to the secret anxiety he felt beneath it, yet he was a man who had travelled much and could readily adapt himself to the manners of the people with whom he was in company. I doubt not that at Versailles he would have been as stately a courtier as with us he was *bon camarade*.

The daylight was fast dying when, in answer to my summons, the gate was at length opened by a surly warder. And the usual formalities having been complied with, I handed over the body of M. de Launay into the custody of the lieutenant of the Tower.

"Adieu," I said at parting, taking the marquis's proffered hand. "And I trust, monsieur, that you will speedily regain your liberty."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows what evil fate lies before us!" he answered lightly. "To-day, M. Cassilis, you are a free man, a good horse beneath you, a sword at your side. To-morrow, you may be—married!" And he disappeared into the gloom of the gate-house.

I gave the word, and we turned our horses' heads and rode slowly back to the Bull Tavern in Cheapside, where we put up for the night. On the morrow I dismissed the cornet and his men with instructions to make all speed in returning to Cleeve; and then with my lord's letter in my breast I set out through the city to deliver it to the Earl of Nottingham.

In every square and open space the citizens were drilling, whilst many of the shops and houses were barricaded as if to withstand a siege, in expectation of the arrival of the French. The earl dismissed my lord's petition very curtly, with a promise of some Dutch troops who were arriving shortly from The Hague. And with this promise I was forced to be content.

Three days afterwards I was back in the capital of the West; and I stayed but to give his Grace of Nottingham's message to my Lord Danvers, and the next day set out southwards.

It was evening when I found myself riding down the valley road within a mile of Cleeve; and I will confess that at every step that brought me nearer the house my

heart beat more rapidly. How would my lady greet me! What would she say to me, or I to her? It was in thinking such thoughts as these and in picturing my welcome that I arrived at length at the entrance gates and saw that which brought me to a sudden halt.

In the earlier part of the day there had been a heavy storm, and the torrents of rain that had then fallen had softened the gravel surface of the avenue. Upon this surface were the marks of many horses' hoofs, and they all led in the direction of the house.

I dismounted and examined them more closely. The prints were fresh—not more than half an hour old; and I speedily came to the conclusion that it was not De Brito or any of his party, for these horses were shod in a manner different to that of the troopers' animals, such as the one I bestrode.

Who, then, were these men, and for what purpose had they come to Cleeve? Was my lady engaged in some desperate scheme to assist the Stuart cause?

Clearly it was incumbent upon me to discover. I turned aside, therefore, within the gates and led my horse through the thick undergrowth to some little distance from the road, and there left him; and I then made my way cautiously through the trees that lined the avenue on either side to a spot from which I obtained a sight of the front of the house, which as yet I had only viewed by night.

Seen by daylight, it was an old grey stone residence, long and low; part of which, I subsequently found, dated back to the reign of the first Tudor sovereign; though

that portion of it that was nearest to me had been added by the present earl. In front of the house lay a broad stretch of green turf; and upon this, beneath a wide spreading oak, a dozen horses were tethered. At some little distance from these lounged a group of six or eight serving men in conversation with the steward, whom I easily recognised again, and who carried a large flagon in his hand. I scanned the front of the house closely, but there appeared no sign of life in its narrow mullioned windows. If I would obtain further information as to my lady's guests, clearly I must seek for it elsewhere.

I turned on my heel, therefore, and made a wide detour through the trees, coming out at length at the back of the house. The house itself and the broad terrace that ran behind it lay a little to my left, and I saw with satisfaction that the windows nearest to me were lighted up, and though I could not from my position see the interior of the room itself, yet I felt that here, if anywhere, was to be found the key of that which was to me at present a mystery.

Concealing myself, therefore, in the deep shadow afforded by a green mass of laurels, I set myself patiently to wait until such time as I could approach the house nearer with less risk of discovery. And fortunately for my purpose the night was a dark one. Over the manor roof a crescent moon hung low down in the heavens, but such light as it afforded was shed upon the front of the house, and the shadow fell the deeper upon the broad terrace before me.

When it was as I judged sufficiently dark to make the attempt, I stole across the grass, and softly crossing the terrace, I gained the shadow of the house itself. Along this I cautiously made my way, cursing my heavy boots, that at every step I took grated harshly upon the gravel walk. Presently I came to a halt. Twenty paces away, the light from the nearest window fell in a broad white patch upon the terrace, shining with a ghostly radiance upon the low wall opposite that ran above the moat. To appear within this circle of light without being seen by any one within the room I saw at once was an impossibility. Yet even as I stood hesitating what I should do next, Fortune settled it for me in an unexpected manner. For without warning the window opened outwards, and a woman clad in white appeared upon the step.

I flattened myself against the ivy-covered wall behind me, and so stood, scarcely daring to draw my breath, for it needed but one glance to assure me that it was my lady herself, the light from within shining full upon her golden hair.

For it may be a minute she stood there gazing into the night. Then with a weary gesture she raised her hand to her brow, and turning on her heel, disappeared into the room, and the light from the window vanished suddenly from the terrace.

I rubbed my eyes and stared again at the spot. In place of the brightly illumined circle of a moment before rested only impenetrable darkness. Yet from the three windows beyond the light was still shining.

As the full significance of this fact dawned upon me,

I stole forward until I reached the step. And I was not mistaken. Inadvertently in re-entering the room, my lady had loosened the curtains, and they had fallen to behind her.

From within came the sound of voices, but the curtains were so thick that the words were indistinct and the light shone through but faintly.

Cautiously I raised my hand and slightly parted the heavy drapery before me, and the interior of the room lay open to my gaze.

Upon the hearth, beside the carved stone chimney-piece, stood my lady, the light of the candles shimmering in the folds of her soft satin gown. Seated at a table near, upon which lay the remains of a meal, were three men, whom I had never before seen. At the head was a sallow, hawk-faced man, with a certain stiffness of carriage that sufficiently proclaimed a military career. He wore a full bottomed periwig and was dressed in a suit of sober black. The one nearest to me was more conspicuous. He was an enormously stout man, in a coat of plum-coloured velvet. He had laid aside his wig upon the table before him, and the light shone upon his round bullet head, crowned with a few scanty locks of hair, which he mopped ever and again with a coloured kerchief. Facing me was a young man of some twenty years of age, dressed in a richly laced suit of grey and silver.

My lady was speaking, but in a voice so changed I could scarcely recognise it as hers; for so far I had but heard it hard and bitter with scorn; now it was soft and raised in pleading.

"Oh," she was saying, "how can you longer hesitate, even for a moment? Or why delay? Surely you, Colonel Wharton, know, depleted of troops as the country is at present, now is the very time for all true friends of the Stuart cause to proclaim themselves openly in arms!"

"Admitting the truth of all that you have said, madam," the man in black answered, "and the fact of the money and arms being to hand at the time you mention, still I cannot but look upon the enterprise as a most desperate one."

"Desperate?" the stout man cried. "'Tis suicide—sheer suicide! Would you have me believe that the country is any the more anxious to receive James back than it was, two years ago, to be quit of him?"

"I am afraid that I do not understand you, sir!" my lady answered. "You have heard what has already been said!"

"Granted," he replied quickly. "And now hear what I have to say, madam. Is it right for us to risk our—" he coughed slightly—"to risk the lives of these poor peasants in a premature and ill-organized rising? The sin of doing so is a matter to be considered, madam. We should unite the—hum!—guile of the serpent——"

"With the courage of the hare!" put in the young man contemptuously.

"With the—hum!—courage of the quadruped mentioned," the other continued, without apparently noticing the sarcasm. "And the affair should be approached with all due circumspection. I think that is the correct phrase, Colonel Wharton?"

"Certainly, certainly," the latter answered. "It is but sound common sense."

"And it savours to me," the young man cried impatiently, "to be more of——"

"Rupert," my lady interrupted quickly, "be silent, I beg of you!"

"Of what, young man?" the colonel said in his precise tone, fixing his eyes upon the other's face. "Of caution, you should say. For take the word of an old soldier who has seen some service in his time, I say that arm your enthusiasts as you will, they will never stand against disciplined troops. And we want no second Monmouth affair to teach us wisdom!"

"But you forget, Colonel Wharton," my lady cried. "What of the French troops that Louis will send us?"

"Pardon me, madam," the colonel replied gloomily. "That he *says* he will send us! I am of opinion that if the house of Stuart relies upon French assistance for its restoration, that event will not take place in my lifetime; although you, madam," he added, "may possibly live to see a grandson of James ascend the throne!"

"The more reason, sir, that we should act, relying on ourselves," the young man cried quickly; and the glance of gratitude my lady gave him was not lost on me. "I am of opinion that never before have James's affairs worn so favourable an aspect. And I, for one, gentlemen, am ready and willing to tread the path her ladyship points out, though, it should lead me to the scaffold!"

"Ah, youth! youth! there spoke thy language," the stout man said, shaking his head slowly with a movement

that set his pendulous chin quivering. "Not that I blame Sir Rupert Courtenay for being outspoken," he added, somewhat hastily, as the other half rose from his seat. "At his age I was like him."

"Young in years I may be," the other cried hotly. "'Tis a fault that time will remedy. At least, I am not a——"

"Gentlemen," my lady cried pleadingly, "for my sake, do not quarrel. "Oh," she continued passionately, "what ill fate clings around the Stuarts, that among their friends every measure formed on their behalf is born to perish in the rifts of selfish strife!"

"If I spoke somewhat hastily, sir," the young man said sullenly, "you must put it down to my Courtenay blood. I am willing for this lady's sake to withdraw my words."

"Let it pass, sir, let it pass," the other answered with a wave of the hand. "As between gentlemen they are already forgotten."

"And may I be permitted to know, madam," the colonel broke in, "the names of those who have consented to aid you in this scheme 'ere adding my own to the number—if I approve of it," he added.

I saw that for a moment my lady hesitated.

Then she drew a folded paper from the bosom of her gown. "See," she cried eagerly with shining eyes. "Here is the authority for what I do, and with the signature of the king himself—my king!" imprinting a kiss upon the parchment. "Gentlemen, I rely upon your honour for their non-divulgence," she added quietly, laying it upon the table before them.

The colonel bowed in acquiescence; and drawing a candle to him, unfolded the paper and glanced at its contents. Suddenly he raised his eyes.

"I see that your ladyship's name heads the list," he said shortly.

"I should be base indeed to ask others to risk danger that I feared to dare myself," she answered proudly.

And I, the silent watcher without, asked myself how he could longer hesitate. Had I been in the man's place, had my lady so looked and spoken to me—pshaw! what foolishness was this! The woman had beaten me like a hound; and I held her life and the lives of the men before me in the hollow of my hand! And I had heard and seen enough of the latter to sum up, in my own mind at least, their characters. God help my lady's scheme if she depended on such men as these for its success!

The colonel finished reading; and with a totally impassive face handed the paper in silence to the stout man beside him.

The latter perused it with sundry short ejaculations; then:

"Hum!" he said at last. "These are well-known names, madam."

"That being so," my lady replied quickly, "and my cousin," she added, indicating the young man in grey—having already signed, it only remains for you, gentlemen, to do likewise!"

"No, no, no," the stout man replied, rising hastily to his feet. "Let there be no waiting, madam! I will put no pen to paper! What!" he added hastily, meeting my

lady's look of wondering contempt, "would you have me hazard my life into the keeping of any one who would sell it, for aught I know, upon the first opportunity?"

"*I* shall keep the paper, sir," my lady answered coldly.

"That may be, madam, that may be," he continued, working himself into a rage. "And it may suit these gentlemen," he added, tapping the paper in his hand, "but it is not so agreeable to me. And besides that, I am not sure that my conscience will suffer me to aid you."

"Your conscience!" my lady cried with infinite scorn.

"Aye, madam, my conscience," he went on, no whit taken aback; "for whether you succeed or fail, shall I be privy to that which will again bring bloodshed with its attendant misery upon the people of this country?"

I waited no longer.

"I will answer that question for you, sir," I cried clearly, stepping into the room. "You will *not!*"

My lady uttered a low cry and stood as if turned to stone, with parted lips and straining eyes. The two men who were seated half rose, clutching at the table before them in the extremity of their surprise. As for the stout man, when his glance lighted upon my uniform he caught his breath with a gasp of mortal fear and fell back into his chair with ashen face and quivering lips, and the paper fluttered from his nerveless fingers.

In three strides I crossed the floor, and in a moment the paper was in my hand. The next and I had thrust it in my breast. That broke the spell.

"You!" my lady gasped in a choking voice.

"'You!' my lady gasped in a choking voice"

"Yes, I, madam!" I answered quickly. "You did not expect me to return so speedily! You keep strange company at Cleeve, my lady," I continued sneeringly. "And such that whilst I take up my residence in this house you will do well to regulate."

Ere she could reply the younger of the men sprang to his feet, upsetting his chair in the act.

"By Heaven, the paper!" he cried. "To me, colonel! We must have it at all hazards!" And he drew his sword. An example which was not followed, however, by the cravens at his side. Remembering the serving men I had seen without, I saw that the matter was getting serious, and I had no wish to hurt the lad.

"One moment," I cried sternly, raising my hand with a gesture of command. "I beg that you will not put me to the trouble of summoning the troopers who wait without; for I think that you forget, gentlemen," I continued slowly, "that if I arrest you in this house, the consequences to my lady will be of the gravest character—consequences," I added, "which I am as desirous of avoiding as you are for reasons of my own."

I saw that my words took effect. The man before me hesitated and then stood still, frowning. I suppose that a moment's reflection showed him the truth of what I had said, for he slowly sank his point.

"What, then, do you propose to do?" he said at last; and I knew by the tone of his voice that the game was in my own hands. Henceforth everything was easy. I would show my lady who was the master here.

"I will tell you," I answered quietly. "But you will

oblige me, Sir Rupert Courtenay—I think that I have the name correctly—by first laying your sword upon the table. And, Colonel Wharton, yours. No hesitation, gentlemen," I continued sternly. "I have force sufficient to ensure obedience."

Still for a moment he wavered in doubt.

"And if I comply, sir, with your request," he said slowly, "what guarantee have I that this lady shall suffer no harm?"

"My word of honour, sir," I answered quietly.

"Honour?" my lady cried quickly. "If you look for aught of honour from this gentleman, I warn you that you will look in vain!"

"I thank you for your good opinion of me, madam," I answered calmly, "which, coming from your ladyship, was such as I should have expected. And I can the more readily overlook your words, since I know how inopportune must be my presence. But I think that for the present it is for me to command and for you to obey."

"I waited a moment, but she did not speak. She only looked at me. Yet that look hurt me more than words. Despite my assumed air of carelessness, the scorn and loathing in her eyes made me wince.

"And I will give your ladyship a word of future advice," I continued with a sneer. "Open windows consort ill with conspiracy!"

"I trust, sir, that you do not include me in that category," the colonel broke in suddenly, "for I think that you have no evidence to support such an assertion."

"No evidence at all," the stout man cried, recovering somewhat from his first shock of surprise. Though if ever conscious guilt looked out of a man's eyes, it was in his, and his twitching lip belied his air of assurance. "Not a shadow of it!" he continued, growing bolder at the sound of his own voice. "And if you were listening, captain, you heard what I was saying. As a magistrate of this country it is my duty—hum!—strictly in the interests of government to acquaint myself with the opinions of the most influential families. Had you delayed your appearance a moment longer, you would have heard the measures I was about to take to—hum!—counteract the scheme of this misguided lady!"

"As to that," I replied—and I could afford to forgive him his cowardice—for the man was playing into my hands, "I am willing to take your word for it, Mr.——?"

"Wetherell," he answered—"Nicholas Wetherell, at your service. I am well known, sir! I believe that I can honestly say," he added pompously, "that I am a man of some weight in the city of Exeter."

I looked him steadily in the face.

"I do not doubt it," I answered quietly.

The young baronet gave a short laugh and the colonel's mouth writhed itself into a grim smile. Nay, for a moment even I thought that my lady's face relaxed somewhat; but, meeting my eyes, she stiffened again into her old mask of scorn.

"Yet I do not know, Mr. Wetherell," I continued dryly, "that the government would entirely approve of your method of obtaining information."

"There is no more loyal subject, sir, in England than I!" he cried hastily.

"Indeed," I answered, "I think that your loyalty, sir, is as strong as your courage!"

"And I trust that the latter does not need to be questioned, captain," he blustered.

"It does *not!*" I replied, with I fear some of the contempt I felt for the man appearing in my voice. "But I will put your loyalty to the test. You have wine there," I continued, stepping to the table, the whilst they watched me in silence. "As loyal subjects, therefore, you will not refuse to join me in drinking a toast."

I slowly filled four glasses, three of which I placed in the centre of the table.

"Gentlemen," I cried clearly, raising the fourth, "to the health of his Majesty, King Willilam!"

For it may be ten seconds they sat silent. The room was very still. I gazed full at my lady where she stood upon the hearth. She was leaning slightly forward, her hands pressed against her bosom, watching the scene before her with fascinated eyes. It was a battle of our wills and I had won!

Suddenly the stout man stretched out a shaking hand.

"To the health of King William, sir!" he cried quickly, all the more anxious to make up for his first slight hesitation. "I desire no better toast." And he drained his glass.

"Nor I also," said the colonel more slowly. "To King William, sir! I wish him success in his campaign!"

But I noticed that he avoided meeting my lady's eyes.

I turned to the young baronet. And here I expected trouble.

"Sir Rupert Courtenay," I said quietly, "it is your turn!"

For a moment he hesitated, and I saw a quick glance pass between him and my lady. Then, to my surprise, he gave a light laugh and raised his glass.

"I drink to the king!" he cried clearly, with a defiant look at me.

I noted mentally his reservation, and I knew whom he meant. But it was not my cue to quarrel with him. I was more than content with my victory.

"Good!" I said aloud, following his example. "That is sufficient, sir! and I replaced my glass upon the table. "I will not detain you longer, gentlemen," I added. "I have already said that for reasons of my own I am willing to overlook your presence here. Whether I take further steps in the matter will depend entirely upon your future conduct. But for the present, gentlemen, there is the door. I should recommend you to take your departure with all speed. The night air is somewhat chilly!"

And they needed no further urging. Without a word the stout man replaced his wig upon his head and, catching up his hat, started for the door. Perhaps he feared that I might yet repent my clemency. And the colonel was not slow to follow his example. True, he had the decency first to turn to my lady, as if to make his adieux; but one glance at her rigid figure and burning eyes was sufficient for him.

"This comes of having a woman in it," he said shortly, turning on his heel and leaving the room.

I glanced at my lady. Her head was bent. I could not see her face. Suddenly, with a quick, defiant movement she upraised it, tossing the hair from her forehead.

"Cousin Rupert," she cried proudly, "your arm!"

The young baronet hastened to do her bidding, and she moved by me, drawing her scented skirts aside, lest they should touch me in passing. At the door, still with her hand upon his arm, she turned.

"You have beaten me twice, sir," she said, in a voice trembling with passion. "For your own sake beware of the third time!" And she swept out.

CHAPTER VI

OF HOW I PLAYED KNIGHT-ERRANT, AND OF MY LADY'S GRATITUDE

When my lady had left the room and the swish of her silken skirts had ceased I hastened to take my departure, for I did not doubt that if it was discovered I had come alone and that the troopers of whose presence I had talked so glibly existed only in my own imagination, her ladyship would take active measures for the recovery of the paper in my possession.

I stepped through the window, therefore, and sought the spot where I had left my horse. I took the bridle in my hand, and, avoiding the avenue leading to the gates, led him through the tangled undergrowth until we came out, some hundred yards below, upon the road.

Here I halted and looked back. There was no sound to break the stillness save the soft sighing of the night wind in the branches overhead. At my feet the white road stretched away into the night, silent and lonely.

I lost no time, therefore, in mounting, and a few minutes later, without molestation, reached the village.

As I rode up the main street I saw that the troopers had quartered themselves upon the inhabitants; for a dozen or more were lounging in the open doorways upon either side of the road, who upon catching sight of my face, stiffened their backs and saluted me as I passed.

Before the inn itself a noisier group were gathered, whose laughter and jests died away for a moment as I dismounted, to again break out with renewed clamour when I had crossed the threshold.

Calling for a light, I made my way to the little chamber that I had previously occupied. Carefully fastening the door behind me and satisfying myself that I was indeed alone, I set the candle upon the little table and drew the precious paper from my breast—the paper big with the fate of my lady's freedom! Perhaps in the temper of the times her life! For I well knew that in the nation's present state of panic the government would have little consideration and respect for either rank or sex. And 'twas well known that the Earl of Ingram was one of James's most trusted councillors.

The paper itself was a small sheet of coarse white parchment and was folded into three.

As I stood turning it over in my hands, on a sudden my lady's face seemed to confront me.

Again I went over the scene so lately enacted, again I heard her clear voice raised in pleading, and moved by some impulse of I know not what, I laid the paper unopened upon the table, and with the candle in my hand I went down on my knees upon the dusty floor.

Presently in the corner of the room farthest from the window I found that which I sought—a loosened board.

With the aid of my sword I raised one end of this, and in the cavity beneath I slipped the fateful parchment, replacing afterwards the board and removing all traces of my handiwork. It was not until this was accomplished

that I breathed more freely, and I sought my couch with a distinctly lighter heart.

It was late next morning when I awoke, and the bright June sunshine was streaming into the room through the little latticed window. I dressed hastily and descended to the inn parlour, where I found the two cornets already at the table. During the meal I gathered from Cornet Graham some information respecting Cleeve. The village itself and the surrounding farms belonging to the Ingram family contained some eight hundred inhabitants; but of this number, fully two hundred—being the young and able-bodied men—were serving under the earl in Ireland. Of the remaining number some eighty only were males, and these the greybeards or youths too young to endure the arduous duties of the Irish campaign.

When I had made myself acquainted with such gossip as he had at his command, I gave the cornets their orders for the day, and returning to my room, arrayed myself in full uniform. Also whilst in London I had taken the opportunity of visiting a tailor's shop in the Haymarket and purchasing to myself sundry little fripperies of attire, such as a lace cravat and fashionable peruke, the which I smiled at myself for donning. Nevertheless, I was minded to look my best when I again presented myself at Cleeve.

My vanity satisfied, I made my way to the stables, and mounting my horse, set out for the manor.

Evidently my arrival had been expected, and my lady had given her orders as to my future treatment; for as I reined in my horse and dismounted before the door, of

a sudden it opened, and the steward came to the head of the steps. Behind him I caught a glimpse of a little group of servants, most of whom were women, who regarded me with feminine curiosity.

"Is it your pleasure to enter, sir?" said the steward respectfully, though the sullen hate in his eyes belied his deferential manner.

"And my horse?" I said curtly, ascending the steps.

"Shall be looked to, never fear," he replied; then, raising his voice: "Martin!" he cried; and at his call the youth who had accompanied him upon the ride to Exeter came slowly forward from the group behind. "Take this gentleman's horse to the stables."

"And see that he lacks for nothing," I said grimly, "or you will regret it, my friend!"

For I had not forgotten this same youth's insolence to me upon the road, and I was determined to show these people that for the present, at least, I was their master.

When he had moved away, muttering and cursing to himself, I followed the steward to the dining hall, which I have previously described. Everything in it was as I had seen it upon my first arrival, only the room was empty.

"My lady is out?" I said carelessly.

"No," the steward answered slowly; "she is not out, but——"

"She is not desirous of seeing me, you would say?" I answered quickly. "Be frank, man! I understand. And for the present it is a matter of indifference to me, as I intend to make myself acquainted with the gardens

and the cliffs adjoining. But you will prepare a room for me," I continued, watching him out of the corner of my eye; "and also inform your mistress that I dine at noon, and must then request their ladyships' presence."

The start he gave did not escape me.

"My ladies will dine with you?" he stammered.

"Certainly," I replied harshly. "Is there any reason why they should not? Or does it require another necklet to teach you that I am a man to be obeyed?" And with this parting shot I left him. At the threshold of the room I turned. He still stood in the centre of the floor, apparently bereft of speech.

"The hour is noon," I said quietly, "and I beg that they will not keep me waiting."

Arrived in the open air, for the first time I remembered that I had not as yet seen the gigantic figure of Sampson Dare; and encountering the youth Martin, I asked what had become of him.

He looked up for a moment from his task.

"He is not here," he said, scowling.

"I asked you *where* he was," I answered dryly.

"In London, then, if it will please you," he retorted sullenly.

"Ah!" was all I said in reply. And turning on my heel, I left him. But I understood perfectly upon what errand the man had gone, and I saw by this, even if I had not received ample proof already, that my lady was not a woman to let the grass grow under her feet. Doubtless she had powerful friends in London whom she trusted

to interest government on her behalf. If so, I thought, time alone will show whether her confidence was misplaced.

For the present, at least, I held the winning cards.

From the stables I took the first broad path, and finally came to the cliffs, where I stumbled upon the little path which we had ascended fourteen days previously in the darkness and storm.

And the longer I looked at it, the more I wondered that our attempt on such a night had not ended in disaster. Even by daylight it was no pleasant task to tread the narrow ledge, as I discovered for myself when I essayed to make the descent. No pleasant knowledge, that a single slip or a momentary giddiness would precipitate me into the sapphire sea, slumbering peacefully a hundred feet below.

Nevertheless, I persevered in the attempt, and in due time reached the beach.

On the flat slab of rock at the bottom of the steps I paused. The tide was fast coming in, and the first waves were gently rocking the boat, that still lay where we had before seen it, in the little bay beneath the cliff.

The sun beat fiercely down upon my head and sparkled upon the crests of the waves, until the whole surface of the water resembled a sea of burnished silver. Presently my eyes lighted upon something that roused in me a momentary curiosity. The beach, as I have previously said, was composed of small, grey pebbles; but about ten feet from the foot of the cliff lay a patch of hard sand, some twelve feet square, its smooth, yellow sur-

face showing plainer by reason of the slate-coloured shingle surrounding it. How it had come in such a place was beyond my imagination to fathom.

For some minutes I stood gazing over the sea; then, turning, I retraced my steps, and passing idly through the sunlit gardens, reached the house.

It wanted a few minutes to the hour when I entered the dining hall, and I saw that my instructions had been obeyed.

In the centre of the room, a table, laden with massive silver plate, had been set out for three. I laid aside my hat and sword and waited for my guests' appearance with a heart that beat more rapidly than was its wont.

Nevertheless, it was five minutes past the hour of noon when the steward appeared in the doorway.

"How is this?" I said curtly. "You carried my message?"

"My ladies would know if you command their presence?" he answered slowly.

"Aye," I cried impatiently. "*Command* them, then, in the devil's name!"

"I will not fail to give them your orders," he retorted quickly, and was gone ere I could make reply.

And presently they came.

Long ere they entered the room I heard the soft rustling of their gowns and the click of their heels upon the polished oaken floor. The younger sister's face was pale, with a certain shrinking timidity in the covert glance she stole at me. My lady's face was stone, and her eyes were hard and glittering. I bowed low to them

on their entering, a salute which the younger woman returned with a slight acknowledgment, and which my lady totally ignored.

When they had seated themselves opposite me, and the steward had placed the covers upon the table, I lost some of my original nervousness in fulfilling the civilities of the table. And I strove to appear entirely at my ease, praising the beauty of the gardens and the cooking of the dishes before us. But to all my conversation—nay, even to direct questions, the younger woman replied only in monosyllables—my lady not at all.

And they made no pretence of eating what I pressed upon them. Stately and still, they sat and looked at me. And gradually I froze!

They could not have hit upon a better device whereby to unnerve me. Minute by minute, try as I would, my assumed air of assurance left me. Beneath the gaze of my lady's scornful eyes, of her rigid figure and curled lip—that all proclaimed my presence as pollution—I felt the hot blood mantling to my brow, and the words died stammering from my tongue.

I strove to gather courage from the wine before me, and my hand was shaking.

Presently I could bear it no longer, and I pushed my plate from me and rose to my feet.

"If you would prefer for the future to dine alone, madam," I said sullenly, "you have my permission to do so."

"I thank you for the concession, sir," my lady said coldly; "which, being prisoners, we have no right to

expect. Also as our jailer," she continued with bitter emphasis, "is it permitted us to take our daily ride alone?"

"Certainly," I answered; though the scathing contempt in her voice and eyes made me wince. "I see no reason against your doing so! And believe me, madam," I continued earnestly, "excepting in so far as my duty here compels me, I have no desire to interfere with your actions or restrain your freedom." Yet I might have spared myself the confession, for without a word of thanks from either of them they moved away. "And one word more, madam," I continued, as they reached the doorway; "the paper——?" and I hesitated.

My lady turned quickly at the words.

"The paper which you stole, sir?" she said coldly.

"Which I—— You use a harsh phrase, madam," I answered irrelevantly, advancing a few paces nearer to her. On a sudden I was minded to prove to her that she was unjust to me—to shame her for her words. "I had no wish," I continued in a low voice, "to use it to your injury, my lady, and so——"

"You can spare me further, sir!" she interrupted icily. "Your insolence I can bear for the present, but not your hypocrisy. That you are present here to-day is insult enough to my womanhood; for the rest, I pray you keep as far from me as the limits of this house permit."

For a moment I stood before her tongue tied and trembling. Then:

"Very well, madam," I said harshly. "As you please! I was about to say that this paper is no longer in my possession, but in the hands of those who will make ruthless use of it should any accident befall me! I am aware that the cliffs of Cleeve are dangerous," I added meaningly; and with a bow I went back to my seat.

But alone with my thoughts, I cursed the foolishness that had led me to demand their presence, and I laid the humiliation I felt at my lady's door. Bah! 'twas a pitiful little triumph, and one worthy of her! As I recalled the look that had shone in her eyes I bit my lip savagely and strove with what appetite I could rally to complete my meal. But the taste had gone from the dishes, the wine was sour.

Presently, in sheer ill humour with things in general, and with my lady in particular, I rose from the table, and making my way to the stables, mounted my horse and set out for the village.

Arrived there, I assembled the astonished troopers, and there for an hour I drilled them in the little square before the inn. And well for the knaves that they gave me no offence upon which to vent my rage, for it would have gone hard with the offender, whomsoever he might have been.

It was whilst engaged in this duty that I became aware of the clatter of a horse's hoofs approaching rapidly down the village street, and looked up to meet my lady's scornful eyes, a smile of disdain upon her lips.

'Twas but a moment's glimpse I gained of her, the next and she had passed; but for me the pleasure had

gone from my task and again my thoughts were embittered.

Accordingly I dismissed the men somewhat curtly, and turning my horse's head, rode past the church in the direction which my lady had taken. I went at a foot pace, however, for I had no desire to overtake the woman in front; at the same time, I was minded to ride as far as Cleevesborough, the tall hill rising to the south of the village. To overtake her? My faith, no! Henceforth I would avoid her and so follow her advice. At the foot of the hill I fastened my horse to a straggling thornbush and ascended the rest of the way on foot. From the summit I glanced below me.

Some two miles distant my lady showed as a rapidly moving speck upon the ribbon of white road that wound down the valley. A mile or so beyond her I could distinguish the upper portion of a large black-timbered mansion rising above the surrounding trees. Long after she had disappeared beneath the latter, I still remained upon the summit of the hill, admiring the beauty of the scene. At length I descended to where I had left my horse, and mounting, rode slowly down to the level of the road. Arrived there, however, I determined that I would not return by the way that I had come, but would strike inland and make my way in a half circle back to Cleeve.

With this intention I crossed the road and entered the trees upon the opposite side. I found that these did not continue for more than a few hundred yards, giving place to a succession of little grass-grown hollows, cov-

ered with sparse, brown bracken, and here and there a scattered boulder breaking through the coarse turf.

In most of these depressions were pools of stagnant water and patches of black bogland that required some caution in avoiding, so that it was not without satisfaction that about a mile farther I came upon a path. It was a mere bridle track running down the centre of the hollow, and was little used, as I saw at once by the marks of the hoof prints upon its surface, which were fully a week old. I set my face in the direction of Cleeve, and the sorrel broke into a trot. The track led from hollow to hollow, some broad, some narrow, and for the most part with marshy, reed-grown ground on either side.

I rode with slackened rein, my hat pressed low upon my brow, and I gave myself up to my thoughts—thoughts in which my lady strangely mingled.

The sun beat down with almost tropical heat upon me; and what little wind there had been on the uplands above was here shut out by the slopes upon either side.

How far I had proceeded thus I do not know, for lulled by the rhythmic stroke of my horse's hoofs, with half-closed eyes I took no account of time.

On a sudden the sorrel stopped with a jerk that all but unseated me. Then he commenced to back, and I felt his flanks quiver. In an instant I was alert, and I searched the pathway in front with my eyes, thinking perhaps some viper or creature of the bog had startled him. But I could see nothing.

Slipping from the saddle, therefore, I soothed the frightened animal as best I could, and glanced keenly

around me. I was in a deeper depression than any I had as yet traversed—a circular, cup-shaped hollow, its sides sloping some quarter of a mile to the ridge above. In front of me stretched the path, to right and left of it patches of bogland, its black surface covered with slime and green water weed.

Stay, was it the path? I bent and gazed fixedly at the track before me, then, unbuckling my sword, I slowly advanced, probing the ground in front of me. At the sixth step my sword encountered no resistance. I drew back with a shudder, and, despite the heat of the day, a cold chill ran down my back. Again I tested the spot with my sword. The green mass quivered at my touch, but there was no solid ground, and in a moment the truth flashed upon me.

The bog upon the right, which stretched some distance up the slope, had slipped, undermining the path, which at a casual glance still retained its ordinary appearance by reason of the green entangled weed floating upon its stagnant surface.

Never had Nature cunningly concealed a man-trap more treacherous. But for my horse's sagacity I should have been—pah! the very thought of sinking slowly beneath the noisome ooze made me shudder. I turned away, and taking the bridle rein in my hand, I skirted round the smaller patch of bogland on the left and regained the track beyond.

Arrived there, however, I did not at once ride forward. On the contrary, I retraced my steps to the brink of the bog, for I was minded to see how far the pathway was

undermined. To the spot where I had stood before upon the opposite side was, as near as I could judge, some fifteen feet. I cast about for some means of warning travellers of their danger; but there was nothing but the bare hillside around me, and with a shrug I turned away. After all, what concern was it of mine? Resolving, however, for the future to take to the ridges and to avoid the low-lying ground, I remounted my horse and headed straight for the top of the hollow, some quarter of a mile distant. I had all but reached the summit of the slope when a dull sound struck upon my ear—the regular thud, thud of a horse's hoofs and of a horse ridden at speed.

I drew rein in idle curiosity as to who the rider might be in such an unfrequented spot. Nearer and nearer came the sound behind me, and a minute or so later the horse and its rider flashed into sight.

It was my lady herself!

My lady mounted on the chestnut mare that I had so admired. And in a moment I understood. The green track that had nearly proved fatal to me led to the mansion I had seen from the summit of Cleevesborough, the smooth turf forming a more pleasant bridle path to the village than the dusty road.

Along this pathway my lady was sweeping at full gallop, was sweeping to the death that lurked below! And I hated her!

But even as the thought came to me I gathered up the reins, drove in my spurs, and in a moment I was thundering down the slope. Even now, though years

have lapsed, how the memory of that ride comes back to me!

Less than a quarter of a mile distant, at right angles to me, and somewhat nearer than I to the green pitfall below, came the chestnut at full gallop, spurning the ground from beneath her flying hoofs. And with a certain shrinking of the heart I could in nowise account for, moment by moment I realised that the sorrel I bestrode was no match for the more thoroughbred and lighter weight of the animal before me. And seeing this, I rose in my stirrups and shouted. It may have been that my words were drowned in the thunder of our galloping hoofs. It may be, seeing that it was I—nay, more likely, I thought bitterly, *because* it was I—my lady took no heed. And in my heart I cursed the wilfulness of this woman who would take naught from me, not even words of warning. Yet this very wilfulness made me but the more resolved to save her—to save her at all hazards! I settled myself, therefore, more firmly in the saddle, and the race continued. And now less than two hundred yards divided us—two hundred yards and the morass between.

Also, now that I was nearer, I realised that for once I had done my lady an injustice, and that the animal beneath her was far beyond her control. So clear, indeed, was the air, so brilliant the glaring light, that I could mark the chestnut's straining eyes and the white foam flying from her lips—aye, and I could clearly distinguish the outline of my lady's graceful figure as she rose and fell to the mare's stride—could see the dainty

head and glowing cheek, the proud, oval face, and the stray tresses of golden hair escaping from beneath her grey velvet riding hat. And now she was but forty yards distant from the brink, and spur as I would, the sorrel might do no more.

Again I rose in my stirrups.

"For God's sake, beware of the bog, madam!" I shouted, pointing to the ground between us. "Turn to the left! To the left!" For I saw that her only chance lay in skirting round the smaller patch as I had previously done. And now, indeed, despite her contempt for me, something in my voice must have attracted my lady's attention, and, accustomed as she was to the nature of the surrounding country, her quick eyes discerned her danger; for I saw her throw her whole weight upon the left rein.

But it was too late, nothing could stop the chestnut now, and seeing this, my lady abandoned the attempt, and arriving at the brink, she lifted the mare with her hand and essayed the leap instead.

For a moment, as she rose into the air, I closed my eyes, and but opened them upon hearing the dull thud with which the mare alighted in safety upon the near side.

Not quite, for her hind feet striking upon the very edge of the path, the soft, spongy turf gave way beneath the shock, and she rolled back into the bog.

Yet my lady was safe. Even in mid air she had freed her foot from the stirrup, and as the mare struck the ground she sprang clear—to fall, indeed, upon her hands and knees on the soft turf a dozen paces distant.

A moment later I reached the spot and flung myself from the saddle. My lady had already regained her feet.

"You are not hurt, madam?" I cried anxiously, forgetful for the moment of the hatred between us.

She did not answer me. No doubt the fall had dazed her. Instead, she turned in the direction of her horse and took two steps forward. But I was too quick for her.

"Have a care, madam!" I cried, barring her further progress. "This is no woman's task, and the ground is dangerous. Trust me," I continued earnestly, "to do all that is possible to save your favourite." I turned from her as I spoke and made my way to the edge of the bog.

With eyes dilated with terror and blood-red nostrils distended, the mare still struggled to regain her footing. At no little risk to myself of being drawn into the bog, I succeeded at length in laying hold of the rein, and I drove my heels into the turf and exerted all my strength —aye, till the muscles of my back and arms cracked beneath the strain—in a vain endeavour to assist her efforts. But though her forefeet, indeed, rested upon the more solid ground, her struggles were growing fainter and she was sinking rapidly. I saw that it was a question of moments only, and there was but one expedient. Loosing hold of the rein with my right hand, I drew my sword and thrust her lightly in the breast.

At the touch of the steel she gave a snort of mingled pain and terror and rose from her knees. Her hoofs caught, slipped upon the soft, wet turf, caught again

as I threw my weight into the scale, and the next moment I was on my back upon the grass, and the hollow spun round me in a golden mist. 'Twas but a second or two I lay there, however, for the mare's head had caught me fairly in the chest and the breath was gone from my body. Then I slowly rose to my feet and turned to look behind me. Twenty paces away my lady stood soothing the frightened animal, that now stood quivering with terror from head to foot.

I approached her slowly, with a feeling of exultation in my breast. For had I not proved my words to her and succeeded? Had I not by service rendered placed her in my debt? Surely I had earned this woman's gratitude, and I would take it as my just reward. She did not look at me as I approached. Instead, she drew a snow-white kerchief from the bosom of her gown and with ostentatious care began to staunch the blood that welled from the wound I had inflicted upon the mare's breast. One might almost have supposed that she thought more of this slight wound than if the animal itself had been engulfed. Three paces from her was a large flat boulder, one of many that lay scattered upon the turf. By the side of this I halted. Still she did not turn her head.

Her hat had fallen back, revealing the tresses of golden hair straying in wild disorder upon her neck. I had leisure to observe more closely the exquisite symmetry of her figure, displayed as it was to its best advantage by the tight-fitting riding coat she wore.

Feeling, I suppose, my eyes upon her, she deliberately

turned her back on me and continued her task as before. I waited two—three—minutes, still she did not speak.

"Am I to have no thanks, madam?" I said at length in a low voice.

"It was a praiseworthy action," she answered icily; "and as such doubtless carries its own reward."

On a sudden my exultation vanished at her words. It was borne in on me that she would rather have been beholden to the meanest beggar upon the road than to me. Yet I would not be discouraged so easily. Again I broke the silence:

"I do not think that the animal is much hurt, madam," I said humbly. "'Tis but a flesh wound at most. Nevertheless, in case of further mishap, may I be permitted to return with you?"

And then indeed she looked at me.

"The road is public property, I believe, sir!" she replied in the same icy tone. "And I cannot prevent you, if you force your presence on me. But if you were anything but what you are—if you laid any pretence to being a gentleman, you would spare me *the loathing of your company!*"

I fell back then, indeed, as if she had struck me, and without a word in reply I returned slowly to the sorrel's side and made pretence of tightening the girths with fingers that were trembling.

This was her gratitude! This my reward! Yet I consoled myself with the thought that even yet she would be obliged to seek my assistance in remounting, and I determined that I would not be the one to again make advances.

But I did not know my lady, nor had I taken into consideration the fact of the boulders scattered plentifully around.

As with my back to her I fumbled at my saddle, I heard the mare's footsteps receding; and, turning sharply, was in time to see her ladyship move slowly away.

Erect in the saddle, with never a backward glance, she urged the mare into a canter, breasted the green slope, disappeared, and left me there in the sunlit hollow—alone!

CHAPTER VII

OF CERTAIN PASSAGES IN THE ROSE GARDEN

NEITHER that day nor the following one did I again see my lady. And if I yet retained some lingering hope of her relenting in her old attitude towards me, I was doomed to be disappointed.

Nevertheless, in pursuance of my duties many a visit I paid to solitary farms and to the houses of the gentry scattered along the coast; at some to meet with the respect which my uniform and the nature of my errand warranted; at others—and these for the most part belonging to Catholic gentlemen—to encounter an ill-concealed hostility that sufficiently testified with whom their sympathies rested. And everywhere I found the same brooding spirit of alarm and discontent. The whole country was on the tiptoe of expectation. Rumours of William's defeat and death were freely circulated by James's infatuated followers. Scarcely a fisherman upon the coast but who woke fully expecting to see a French army drawn up upon the shore. Indeed, throughout all the western counties the Jacobites were secretly arming, awaiting but the success of the Stuart cause in Ireland to kindle anew the flames of civil war.

Such was the condition of England in this, the month of June, 1690. 'Twas some ten days after the incident in the hollow that I again had speech of my lady. Intelli-

gence had reached me of a rumoured landing of arms in the neighbourhood of Teignmouth. Leaving De Brito, therefore, and twenty men to guard the village, with the remaining two-score troopers at my heels, I set out northwards. Whether, for once, rumour had lied, or whether the Jacobites had got wind of our presence I do not know; but certain it is that though we lay all that day and the next concealed in a beech wood near to the town nothing occurred, nor did we see any sign of a vessel off the coast.

On the third day, therefore, empty handed, we returned to Cleeve. It was evening, when, dismissing the troopers at the entrance gates, I rode up to the manor.

Seldom, I think, in all my wanderings have I witnessed a more lovely night. Behind the torrs, in a golden glory the sun was sinking to its rest, gilding the foliage of the oaks with a dozen varying shades of orange, pink and purple, and in the light of which the house before me stood refulgent, as if 'twas bathed in lambent flame.

I rode slowly to the stables, and having seen my horse safely stalled, I passed by way of the terrace to the house.

The doors and windows stood wide open, for 'twas a warm June night and the smoke curled lazily from the tall chimneys into the still evening air; but there was no other sign of life about it, and I entered and made my way to the dining hall without encountering any one.

Here indeed, though I met with the same solitude, I found a cold collation upon the oaken table, to the which I readily applied myself, wondering the while at the

silence of the house and half wishing—such is man's inconsistency—for their ladyships' presence. Once, my eyes travelling through the open window, rested upon the figure of a woman passing swiftly down one of the terrace walks. But the distance and the gathering dusk left me uncertain as to whether it was my lady or no.

Presently I rose and sauntered slowly through the gardens to the cliffs; and here, upon the highest point, I flung myself upon the grass and gazed in genuine admiration upon the scene.

Long I lay there watching the lights spring up, one by one, in the village below me, until the crimson glow faded from the fleecy clouds above; then at last I rose and slowly retraced my steps. As I passed through the misty, scented gardens, idly culling the roses that lined the pathway on either side, the bats were fluttering around me on their silent wings, and faintly in the deepening dusk came the hoot of wandering owls. Somewhere in the trees around the house a nightingale poured forth its flood of song, as slowly upon the quiet landscape fell the peaceful stillness of the summer night.

Presently I saw upon my right a green arch of yew, and passing beneath this, I came upon a spot the like of which I have never seen to equal. Surely, I told myself, this is my lady's garden, and one well worthy to match with her in point of loveliness. For it was a veritable bower of roses—a smooth stretch of green lawn, interspersed with beds of flowers of every conceivable shade of colour. The thick yew hedge enclosing it was cut in the stiff and formal manner of the

Dutch, a fashion brought with William from the The Hague. In the centre stood a white marble fountain, the jet from which fell with a pleasant plash into the wide basin beneath. One side of this enclosure was fenced by the low stone wall that ran above the moat, and facing me, another leafy arch gave entrance to the terrace walk beyond. Yet it was not admiration for the scene before me that brought me to a sudden halt and caused my heart to quicken its pulsations; for upon the broad steps at the fountain foot a woman was seated with a canvas in her hand, a brush and palette at her side. At the sound of my footsteps she turned her head, and I saw that it was my lady's sister, Mistress Grace.

"Captain Cassilis," she said with a winning smile, "saw you ever a more lovely night? Alas! I fear that my poor efforts fall far short of the reality. But you shall judge, sir, of their merits for yourself." And she held the canvas out to me.

For a moment I stared at her in sheer astonishment. Then with a beating heart I took the canvas in my hand; for although she had not shown the same hostility towards me that my lady had done, yet never before had she addressed me of her own free will.

"You will let me see it?" I said humbly.

"You have been a great traveller, I believe, sir," she answered; "and therefore your opinion should carry weight.

"But you do not speak!" I held the painting from me, the better to observe it; though had it been the finest masterpiece that Rome or Florence could produce, I

doubt if in that moment I had marked its beauty; for my head was in a whirl. Was the barrier between myself and these women to be broken down at last?

"Madam," I replied hastily, "to say that it is beautiful, is only——"

"To flatter me!" she interrupted quickly, as I hesitated, racking my brains for a phrase she might not deem extravagant. "And," she continued lightly, "is it your custom, sir, to judge of a picture's excellence upside down?"

"Madam," I stammered in utter confusion, "I crave your pardon——"

"Fie, sir!" she continued, smiling. "Do you not know that to wound a woman's vanity is to make an enemy for life? And I had inferred," she continued in the same tone of raillery, glancing at the roses in my hand, "that you were a lover of Nature yourself."

"If, madam," I said hesitatingly, "you would permit me in some slight measure to retrieve my unfortunate error, and would so far honour me as to accept this humble tribute of my regret——"

"I love flowers," she said simply, taking my proffered gift and raising it to her face, perhaps to hide her heightened colour.

"And I also," I replied, looking down at her slight, girlish figure, as with deft fingers she rearranged the roses in her lap. "For to one fresh from the reeking kennels of London, where pestilence stalks hand in hand with crime, this old world garden where you live comes as a glimpse of Eden."

"Yet I have read, sir," she said impulsively, "that every Eden has its——"

She broke off abruptly without finishing the sentence; and even in the dusk I saw the warm blood mantle to her brow.

"Its serpent, you would say," I said quietly, reading her thoughts; "aye, madam?"

For a moment or two there was silence—a silence broken only by the soft sound of the falling water and the voices of the night. I glanced at the woman before me and my heart sank. What a gulf there was between her life and mine!

Presently she spoke.

"It was a thoughtless speech," she said in a low voice. "I pray you forget my hasty words."

Again there was silence between us. But the memory of my errand in this place, of my lady's open scorn, and of the haunting feeling of unrest that I had previously felt recurred to me again with double force.

"You, at least, do not hate me, madam," I said bitterly, leaning upon the marble basin and gazing into the water below.

"It may be that I have not my sister's pride," she answered slowly, "or it may be that my nature is not formed for hatred. And then—" she continued, bending lower over the flowers, so that I could not see her face.

"Yes, madam?" I said inquiringly, as she paused.

"Forgive me if I am wrong," she replied; "but I do not think that you are happy here."

"Happy?" I cried, startled out of my self-control.

"God knows that I am not! Do you imagine that I have no feeling? That it is pleasant for me to be shunned as if I were a leper—unfit for human ken? But for your kindly speech of me to-night, since first I came to Cleeve I have encountered naught save contumely and cruel words. Yet I would remind you, madam, that another in my place might not have dealt with you so leniently."

In the silence that followed on my words—a silence in which the woman before me rose to her feet, and, laying the flowers that I had given her upon the fountain rim, stooped to collect her scattered colours—a quick step sounded on the terrace walk, and my lady's figure appeared beneath the arch of yew.

"Why, Gracie?" she cried gaily. The fountain was between us—she had not discerned my presence. "I have been seeking everywhere for you! And what is this?" she continued, catching sight of the flowers, and raising them to inhale their fragrant odour. "Roses? Ah, now I understand! Cousin Rupert has been here, and the painting, I fear me, was but a pretext!"

"Indeed but you are wrong!" Mistress Grace replied with pretty confusion. "It was this gentleman who gave them to me!"

At her words I stepped aside, and my lady and I were face to face. It sent a swift pang to my heart to see the sudden change upon her face. A moment before she had been gay and smiling, but now, at sight of me the smile was frozen on her lips, and the hand in which she held the flowers fell to her side again. For it may be twenty seconds thus we stood, her eyes hardening with

the pride I knew so well. Then she spoke. "It was kind indeed of Captain Cassilis to give us of our own," she said coldly. "But in the house yonder there are of flowers enough and yet to spare. And for your compassion, sir, toward our fallen state, it may follow—these!"

She had been standing near to the wall that ran above the moat, and now, suiting the action to her words, she tossed the roses contemptuously into the black water below.

"Come, Gracie," she added, turning on her heel.

In a few strides I had barred her further progress.

"One moment, madam," I said hoarsely; "I desire a word with you."

"The desire is not reciprocal, sir," she answered icily. "Permit me to pass."

"Not until you have heard me, madam," I cried desperately. "Even the greatest of criminals can claim so much right."

"In that case," she replied with bitter irony, "your claim is indisputable. Say on, sir. We are but two unarmed women here."

For a moment, speechless, I stared at her, with the hot blood flushing to my face. How this woman hated me!

"Well, sir," she cried impatiently, "have you nothing to say? No further insults for your prisoners?"

"Madam, madam!" I burst out passionately, "what have I done to you that you should hate me so?"

"*Hate* you?" she answered slowly, gazing at me with hard, cruel eyes. "I think that you mistake me, sir.

You are too mean, too base a thing to hate. *I loathe you!*"

And as with bent head, to hide the pain her words caused me, I stood aside, without further notice, save, indeed, one pitying glance from Mistress Grace, they passed me by, and I heard their footsteps die away into the night.

Long I remained where they had left me, my brain a chaos, a tumult in my breast. The song of the nightingale still quivered on the peaceful air, and the moon rose high in the heavens, silvering the tops of the surrounding oaks and flinging the shadows of their twisted boles upon the grass. Yet still I lingered by the fountain, in no wise conscious of the flight of time, whilst the very leaves, whispering to the passing breeze, seemed but to mock me with the echo of my lady's words. Presently my brain grew clearer. What was this woman to me that I should imagine that her words could wound me? Or what concern of mine the opinion that she held of me? 'Twas but a week or two at most, and Cleeve, its fortunes, and its mistress would but linger in my memory—a vanished dream. Or, at the most, the vision of my lady would shine athwart the pathway of my chequered life, like as a radiant star above my head shot suddenly across the lighted heavens and vanished in illimitable space.

With a grim smile and a firm step I made my way to the house. Arrived in the hall, however, a surprise awaited me. Within the main entrance, seeming to fill the doorway, and conversing with my lady in low tones, stood the formidable figure of Sampson Dare.

The actual words I could not catch, but of the failure of his mission I could readily guess, both by his dejected face and also by the fact that at the sound of my footstep my lady turned swiftly away, and with bent head and averted face passed up the oaken stair. When the last rustle of her skirts had died away I slowly crossed the hall.

"Well, my friend," I said, addressing the giant before me, not wisely, I admit, "what news of London?"

He scowled at me for a moment without speaking, then bending suddenly, he thrust his face within a foot of mine, and I felt his hot breath on my cheek.

"Hark you!" he growled hoarsely, opening and shutting his great hands, "but for my orders I would twist your neck and think no more of it than if I killed a rat!"

"Tush, man!" I made answer, meeting his gaze firmly, though I confess I was considerably startled at his words, for well I knew that once within his iron grip, the man had strength to carry out his threat, "and bring the troopers down upon the house? You should best know in that case what consideration your mistress would be like to meet with at their hands. No, no," I continued coolly, twisting my moustaches, "I give you credit for more sense than that, unless, indeed, your body's growth has dwarfed your brain."

His face had fallen at my words. I suppose he saw their wisdom, but he still regarded me with a look of vindictive hatred.

"So you shelter yourself behind the women, do you?" he said at length. "Very well, Master Chicken-

heart! Only, should it happen that they cannot shield you——"

"In that event, my friend," I answered, lightly tapping the butt of the pistol in my sash, "the bigger the bulk, the easier the mark. You understand?" And without further words I left him. But that night on retiring to my chamber, for the first time I took the precaution of sounding all the walls and flooring with my sword, and having assured myself as to the non-existence of a secret entrance, I placed my sword and pistols within easy reach of my hand; for with so resolute a man now at her bidding, I was by no means certain that my lady might not attempt some desperate scheme against me. Nay, as I stood at the open window gazing across the woods to where the moonlight fell upon the old church tower and the slumbering hamlet below, I was minded for the moment to transfer my quarters to the village inn. But shame at such a course kept me to my post, and I flung myself at last upon my couch, conscious that the day had brought to me another formidable antagonist, a relentless foe.

Under the circumstances, therefore, it is not to be wondered at that I slept but ill, or that it was with a distinct feeling of relief I awoke from a troubled slumber to hear the distant clock upon the church strike five.

I sprang from my couch and set the window wide. By my faith! 'twas a morning to put heart in any man. The fresh sea breeze stole softly through the casement, fragrant with the scent of opening flowers. Overhead a few fleecy clouds drifted idly beneath a dome of deepest

blue, whilst in the gardens below me, flooded by the summer sunshine, gorgeous butterflies on painted wings flitted above the dew-bespangled grass.

As, lost in thought, I leaned upon the sill, the fancy for a swim in the distant, murmuring sea commended itself so strongly to my mind that, hastily dressing, I took my sheathed sword beneath my arm and descended the stairs. No one was as yet abroad, and all was silent in the house when I quietly unbarred the outer door and stepped upon the terrace. And now that I was in the open air, my courage, that had somewhat waned the night before, returned to me. I laughed at the fears that then had power to shake me, and I told myself with a thrill of pardonable pride that over all this fair domain and that which it contained I was the master, and would prove my power. But on arrival at the cliffs my exultation suffered a sudden check, for I had scarcely set foot upon the narrow path when my eyes, travelling to the beach below, fell upon that which caused me to fling myself down upon the grass and to peer cautiously over the edge of the cliff; for in the little bay beneath, a boat, urged by a single pair of oars, was rapidly approaching to the land. Presently it grounded on the shingle, and in the solitary occupant who sprang ashore I recognised the figure of Sampson Dare. He beached the boat high and dry above the receding tide, and, stooping, took from thence a lantern and a cloak. This done, he straightened his back, and, unconscious of the watcher overhead, shading his eyes, stood looking out to sea. What in the name of mystery was the man doing here—here at this early hour, with a

lantern in his hand? Clearly, the very fact of this proved that he had been out all night. Yet for what was he watching now? Or what did the man expect?

And suddenly the answer came, for the thick haze that had hitherto hung upon the surface of the water was rapidly dissipating beneath the sun's increasing power, and as with its disappearance the prospect widened, away out at sea, some two miles distant, I caught sight of the dark hull of a small vessel with a cloud of white canvas above, looking for all the world like some great seabird riding on the wave.

Short time had I to note her appearance, however, for even as I gazed the helm swung round, and heading for the open sea, she vanished in the golden mist beyond.

Not till then did the figure of the man below me turn and with a quick step ascend the beach. And seeing this, I quickly withdrew, concealing myself among the shrubs, where I could command both a view of the path by which he must come and also of the house itself, and setting myself to wait for what should follow.

And presently my patience was rewarded, for on arriving within sight of the house, at the beginning of the sloping lawns, he came to a sudden halt, and after closely scanning its windows, fell to pacing up and down the grass. Nor had he long to wait before the door by which I had left the house suddenly opened and my lady herself stepped forth into the light.

At sight of her the man again advanced, and they met upon the little bridge above the moat, that, as it were, divided all the gardens from the house.

What my lady was saying to him, or that the fact of the door being unbolted had caused her some uneasiness, I could not but shrewdly guess; for they both turned to look up at my open window. And I saw the big man lay his hand upon the long rapier at his side with a gesture that boded ill for me should my presence be discovered, and set me crouching closer in the bushes, cursing my scarlet coat and heavy military boots that compelled me to remain in my concealment, from which I could neither advance nor retreat. Yet the entrance to the rose garden lay but some dozen feet away; if, I thought, as they turned once more and came towards the place where I lay, that was their goal, then surely my ears were keen enough to give me the key to this mystery. That it was a plot with which my fate was somehow connected I did not doubt; the presence of the vessel alone confirmed my opinion, and I awaited with a beating heart for their approach.

But again, I confess, I did not know my lady, and I could not but admire her caution, for when within thirty feet of where I lay, on a sudden she turned sharply aside, and leading the way to the very centre of the open lawns, careless of whether I should see them together, they sauntered slowly up and down in earnest conversation. Of the nature of this latter I could only guess, but in the added sparkle of my lady's eye, in the prouder poise of her lovely head, I read all the signs of a settled purpose, of indomitable will.

They parted eventually at the little bridge, the big man evidently receiving some instructions, for he nodded

repeatedly, and strode off in the direction of the stables.

After he had disappeared my lady still remained leaning, lost in thought, against the low stone parapet. But if, as I now believe, she had a suspicion of my presence near, why then 'twas well conceived, for while she was there I dared not move, and thus the time was gained for Sampson Dare to speed upon his errand.

'Twas full five minutes ere she roused herself, and then, with a searching glance over the sunny gardens, turning on her heel, she walked slowly to the house.

It was not until the door had closed upon her that I ventured from my hiding place, and stealthily making a wide detour, for I would not have her deem that I had played the spy, came out upon the avenue before the house. Passing thence to the stables, I found my suspicions considerably strengthened, for Sampson Dare was nowhere to be seen, and the powerful grey that he bestrode was missing from its stall.

But if the events of the morning left me in some perplexity, they left me also alert and on my guard to face the threatened danger, and I returned slowly to the house, fully determined to probe the secret to its core. I spent the morning, therefore, in hanging about the house and stables, seeking for something that would enable me to form a clue. But nothing occurred, nor did Sampson Dare again return, and reluctantly I owned myself completely baffled.

Towards noon, grown weary of inactivity, I mounted my horse with the intention of riding to the village, but

I had got no further than the gates of the manor when I was startled by the sound of a cavalry trumpet echoing amongst the torrs.

Shading my eyes with my hand, I gazed down the valley. Upon the winding road from Exeter, and still some two miles distant, I saw the scarlet coats and glittering accoutrements of a regiment of horse upon the march. And upon the leading files approaching nearer, I was no less surprised to recognise my own comrades of the Tangier Horse. At the sight I turned the sorrel's head, drove in my spurs, and rode down to meet the approaching column. I received a hearty welcome from my fellow-officers, and a few minutes later I was riding side by side with Colonel Savage, a man as much disliked and feared as was the brutal Kirke himself.

In answer to the questions that he put to me, I gave him a brief account of my adventures, omitting much, however, relating to my lady; for the coarse jests of the men around me upon the nature of my present duty grated with an unwonted distaste upon my ear.

Yet these were the men with whom I had been content to ruffle it with the best—nay, even to be looked upon as a sort of leader, on the reputation of my swordsmanship. I, a gentleman of family! At the thought a sudden rush of shame pervaded me.

"So this is Cleeve," the colonel said abruptly. We had reached the entrance gates. "I would I had the harrying of yonder dove cot. But that my orders to advance admit of no delay I would visit it as in the days of '88."

'Twas my turn now to do the questioning, and in reply

he told me they were bound for Plymouth, whither every soldier in the county was being hurried, since the French fleet, under Tourville, was hovering off the coast and a descent upon the town was daily expected. Also, that in Ireland affairs had reached a crisis. William, with an army of not less than thirty thousand men, was in full march southwards; whilst James had retreated from his camp at Dundalk and thrown himself into Drogheda. It was expected that a battle would be fought in the immediate vicinity of Dublin.

All this and more—for of the doings of the outer world I had but scanty news—he told me as we rode; so that it was with surprise I found that we had reached the outskirts of the village. A deep frown gathered on the colonel's face as at our appearance the troopers hastened from the houses.

"The rogues grow lazy," he said grimly. "I will promise them no lack of work between here and Plymouth."

"Plymouth?" I said inquiringly.

"Aye," he answered quickly. "Do you suppose that I can leave three-score troopers rotting here when every man is needed in the south?"

"But——" I began in some dismay.

"There is no 'but' about it," he said impatiently. "My orders are strict. Nevertheless, I will strain a point in your favour. You shall have a dozen men."

"A dozen men?" I cried incredulously—"a dozen men to guard this place?"

"And that is ten too many," he replied. "What? Are

you afraid of a set of country clodpoles, who could not tell a sabre from a scythe?"

"Yet even a scythe may form a dangerous weapon, as Sedgemoor proved," I said tartly.

"Bah!" he replied contemptuously. We were dismounting in the courtyard of the inn as he spoke. "'Tis not like you, Cassilis, to reckon odds. A pity, indeed, if a dozen men cannot order a parcel of beer-swilling clowns, who would scuttle to their burrows fast enough at the snapping of a pistol. But who the devil have we here?"

I looked up quickly at the words. We were approaching the steps in a body when the door of the inn suddenly opened and a man came hastily out.

He was dressed in riding costume, and as he halted in surprise at sight of us, I saw that it was the young baronet, my lady's cousin.

"Permit me, colonel," I said, stepping forward, "to bring to your acquaintance Sir Rupert Courtenay, of Clevedon Hall."

"Courtenay?" said the colonel, frowning. "I knew a Courtenay years ago in Flanders."

"My father fell at Teneffe," the young baronet replied with visible impatience.

"What?" cried the other heartily. "You are the son of Richard Courtenay—'Fighting Dick' we called him—my old comrade in arms? The most rampant Papist and prince of good fellows that ever drew sword from scabbard. Aye, aye! I can trace the likeness now. But 'tis no place for discussion, this. You will join us within."

"Your pardon," stammered the young man, who, I could not help seeing, was considerably embarrassed at his words, "but—there is an appointment——"

"With a woman, I'll warrant," the colonel said quickly; then noticing the flush upon the other's face: "Tchut! women will keep. And I will even hold you my prisoner for the time and so preserve you from temptation. Nay, I will take no denial, sir," he continued peremptorily. "You shall share the honours of our table, and we will crack a bottle to your father's memory."

Accordingly the whole party followed them to the inn parlour, whither the landlord was speedily summoned to attend their wants. But as for me, in the confusion caused by our arrival I passed unnoticed from the room and left the inn.

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE DUEL IN THE WOOD

Once, however, in the open air I paused; and then, with no fixed intention in my mind, I slowly crossed the yard and peered in at the open stable; and here, indeed, a surprise awaited me, for a horse, which I recognized as belonging to the young baronet, and upon which he had twice visited the manor, was standing unsaddled in the nearest stall.

Wrapped in thought, I stood staring at the animal before me. From the inn came a confused babel of voices, the clatter of crockery, the clink of cups, and now and again a burst of laughter. But to all this I gave no heed, for my brain was thinking deeply. What was Sir Rupert Courtenay doing here? And, seeing that he lived but some three miles distant, for Cleveden Hall was the old mansion I had seen from the summit of Cleevesborough nestling in the trees, what purpose could he have in putting up his horse at the village inn? That he was bound for the manor I did not doubt. But would any man forsake his horse at the village to walk the remainder of the way on foot? The idea was preposterous. And then I remembered his confusion at the colonel's words, and the appointment he had mentioned, and a sudden light broke on me, and all was plain. He had come to meet my lady, was in her confidence, a

sharer of her schemes! Dolt that I was, not to have thought of it before! He had come to meet my lady—but where?

A few moments thought, and it flashed upon me like an inspiration.

At the beginning of the village, where the parkland surrounding the manor ceased and the first scattered houses of the street began, parallel with the road, a narrow winding path ran through the woods. I had stumbled upon it by accident when first I came to Cleeve, and though I fancied it was seldom used, save by the servants of the manor in their errands to and from the village, 'twas an ideal spot, I vow, in which to hold a tryst. Aye, and as the memory of it grew upon me the very spot itself was mirrored clear before my eyes.

At one place in the wood, where the pathway widened to an open clearing, a little rustic bridge was thrown across a stream. 'Twas here, if anywhere, that they were like to meet. If only I could make my way to this spot unperceived and conceal myself in the vicinity, it was more than likely that I should learn the meaning of these mysteries. True, 'twas not an honourable part to play eavesdropper, but I consoled myself for what misgivings I had upon the subject with the thought that all was fair in war, and that if the part was thus forced upon me, why, 'twas my lady herself who was to blame for it.

With my resolution formed, I roused myself for action. I knew that for the execution of my project I had time to spare, for I was well assured, however urgent were his orders to advance, the colonel would not yet release

his guest. Accordingly, unnoticed by any one within, I passed across the yard and gained the village street, threading my way between groups of men and horses, until I stumbled at length upon the man I sought, the one-eyed sergeant of my troop, and to him I gave instructions to secure my horse and to choose a dozen men on whom he could rely, and with these, upon the regiment's departure, to take possession of the inn and to await my further orders.

He saluted in return, and I watched his burly figure go clanking down the street. Then satisfied that I had at least one tried and cunning soldier to uphold me, I continued on my way.

When I had left the village behind me and had reached the woods, I turned sharply to the right, and at a distance of some two hundred yards from the road I came to the entrance of the little path. As I stepped into the cool shadow of the trees, I paused irresolutely, as a sudden thought struck me. What if it was not my lady he had come to meet, but Mistress Grace! I had seen enough with my own eyes to convince me that there was a warmer feeling existing between them than mere cousinly affection. Was all my cunning scheme to end in witnessing a lover's meeting?

Almost I had persuaded myself that this was indeed the case, and I was strongly tempted to retrace my steps. But the memory of the dark, mysterious vessel I had seen deterred me from my purpose, and again I set my face resolutely towards the house, and at the next turning in the path I came upon something by which my ardour

was considerably stimulated, for fluttering from a thorn bush beside the track was a shred of scarlet cloth.

I took this tell-tale witness in my hand and closely examined it. It was of the same material as the coat I wore, and had been but recently torn from its wearer, for now that I gazed about me, my suspicions roused, in a patch of moist turf at my feet I saw the fresh print of a man's spurred heel. I gazed eagerly ahead; but the pathway so wound and twisted that I could not see a dozen feet before me—only the hot sun slanted through the leaves above and fell upon the thickets of brier, and bush and bracken that walled me in on either side with a hedge of emerald green.

I listened, but no sound reached my ear save the hum of insect life around me and the sough of the wind in the whispering trees. Yet who was the man who had recently passed along this path? And why should a trooper be wandering in the woods?

The more I thought of this, the more it puzzled me. I could hazard no conjecture as to the man's identity, still less as to his purpose. Only, with a growing uneasiness, I loosened my sword in its sheath and advanced more cautiously, searching the bushes on either side.

It may have been for some quarter of a mile I had proceeded thus when, upon drawing near to the little clearing, on a sudden I heard the sound of a man's deep voice and a woman's startled cry.

At the sound I slipped amongst the bushes on my left, and forcing my way through their tangled growth, at

the turning of the path I parted the leafy screen before me and gazed across the little clearing.

Two figures met my eyes. In the woman standing with her back to me I had no difficulty in recognising my lady; but, dazzled by the sunlight, I was forced to look twice at the man who faced her at the head of the bridge, barring her progress—the man dressed in the uniform of the Tangier Horse—ere I clearly perceived his features. It was De Brito!

De Brito! The sight of him came as a revelation to me. For at once I remembered that I had not seen him at the village when the regiment rode in, though in the incidents following our arrival this fact had escaped my memory. But the explanation of his presence in the manor woods I had yet to learn, and I bent my attention on the scene before me.

What had already passed between them I could only guess, but my lady was now speaking.

"Are you aware, sir, that this is private ground?" she said clearly.

"Private?" De Brito answered mockingly. "Aye, aye! A sweet spot for a meeting. But seeing that the recreant lover is but a laggard, why, you should thank me, mistress, that I am here to take his place."

"Whoever you may be I do not know," my lady answered, her figure trembling with surprise and passion, "but be assured of this, your insolence to me shall not go long unpunished. And now, stand aside."

"Oho! you think to frighten me with fine words, do you, madam?" he sneered, his evil smile replaced by an ugly

frown. "Not so fast, my dainty dove; you came hither for your own pleasure, you will remain awhile for mine."

"Let me pass," my lady replied, advancing boldly towards him.

But she had mistaken her man. Instead of giving place to her, he took two steps forward and gripped her wrists.

"You shall pass fast enough, mistress," he said roughly, "but first I will even take toll of those ripe lips; for who passes, pays." And despite her struggles he strove to draw her towards him. Up till now I had remained a silent spectator of the scene; nay, I had even felt a thrill of satisfaction that my lady should see that not every one would treat her with the same forbearance that I had shown towards her; but when he laid hands upon her a sudden flame of anger took possession of me, and I sprang into the open space.

"You hound!" I cried.

At my words, releasing his hold upon my lady's wrists, he stepped backwards, a circumstance of which I was not slow to take advantage by placing myself between him and the bridge. But his surprise once mastered, he faced me with a lowering brow.

"So," he said sneeringly after a moment's pause, "the recreant lover arrives. Now I understand, and I congratulate you, mistress, on your choice."

"You fool!" was all I could stammer, so taken aback was I at his words; "what do you mean?"

"What I say," he answered in the same sneering tone. "We were blind not to have suspected it before. 'Tis not the first time a pretty face has caused a man to

change sides. And I come between you, do I?" he continued darkly. "I am a spoil-sport, am I? Yours, and that——"

I checked the foul word on his lips by a blow that sent him reeling backwards, when, his spurred heel catching in a projecting root, he fell heavily to the ground.

Throughout the foregoing scene my lady had remained standing in the same spot, as if doubtful what course to take.

"Go, madam," I said quietly, unsheathing my sword and placing myself to cover her retreat, though without daring to take my eyes from the man before me.

As the latter rose slowly to his feet I heard my lady's receding footsteps cross the bridge and die away upon the woodland path, and in another minute I had need of all my skill to meet the attack of the man before me, for with a furious oath he drew his sword and flung himself upon me, and our blades met to the sound of the music that I loved so well.

From the first I read murder in his eyes, and so fierce, indeed, was his attack that I was driven back to the bank of the stream; and it was only when I felt myself upon the very edge of this that I realised my danger. I dared not turn my head, but instinctively I knew that one step backwards and I should fall some four feet to the bed of the stream, where, penned between its narrow banks, I was practically at my opponent's mercy, and what form this latter would take I read all too clearly in his blood-shot eyes. He saw his advantage, too, for with a short cry of triumph he redoubled his efforts, so that I tottered

on the very brink. But his very confidence of success was like to have been his undoing, for rallying myself with the courage of despair, I parried his furious lunges and thrust so shrewdly in return that I laid his cheek open from brow to chin.

Startled for a moment by the suddenness of the attack, and blinded by the blood that sprang freely from the wound, he threw himself violently backward, thus narrowly escaping the second thrust with which I followed up my advantage.

But the respite thus afforded me was sufficient. I sprang lightly aside and renewed the fight upon more equal terms. Once, indeed, we paused as if by mutual consent, and faced each other with dripping brows and labouring breath. But in a few moments' time we fell to it again, and the glade resounded to the rasping of our blades, that thrust and parried, twined and clicked together like sentient things of evil; whilst the sun lay hot upon the clearing and the birds flew chattering from the surrounding woods. And once again I narrowly escaped with my life, for as we circled round each other I stumbled over the very root that had previously caused his downfall, and though I sprang instantly aside, so near was the fierce thrust that he aimed at me that his point shredded the cambric at my throat.

Up till now I had been acting mostly on the defensive, but roused by this last attack to sudden passion, and conscious of a thin trickle of blood upon my breast that warned me how near had been my peril, I called all my skill to my aid and began to press him in my turn.

And from that moment the aspect of the fight altered, for good sword though the man was, his intemperate habits were against him, and whereas, minute by minute, as the fight proceeded I felt myself growing cooler and settled more steadily to my work, the sweat gathered thicker on his brow and his chest heaved in panting breaths to his exertions. Thickset as the man was, and like a bull for strength, I felt his thrusts momentarily grow weaker, and foot by foot I pressed him backwards across the open space—back until he could retreat no further by reason of the encircling trees; and then, as I felt his pressure on my blade diminish, twice I drove him round the little clearing. Nor for all his renewed efforts could he make headway against me or even hold his ground.

Once he rallied, twice he rallied, but my wrist was iron and I would not be denied. And with my glittering point ever at his breast, looking into my grim face, I think he tasted then the bitterness of death. Think? Nay, I know. I could read in his dilated eyes, in the snarling, blood-streaked lips, that reminded me of naught so much as of a trapped wolf, that he realised that he was mastered. The man was no coward, as I knew, but reading my purpose by his own, small blame to him that the shadow of doom gathered upon his face, or that as for a third time I drove him before me, a low groan escaped his lips.

"Curse you!" he gasped hoarsely, parrying wildly; "finish it, and be——"

And even as he spoke the end came, for putting aside

a still wilder thrust, I slipped within his guard and wounded him in the wrist.

At that the sword fell from his nerveless fingers, and staggering to the nearest tree, he leaned against its knotted trunk, while the blood dripped steadily upon the grass and his breath came in long-drawn, labouring sobs. And at this moment from the direction of the village the trumpets of the regiment sounded the "assembly." The sound was wafted clearly to our ears upon the breeze, and I saw De Brito start and straighten himself ere turning to me with a puzzled frown.

"Well," he said hoarsely, "what are you going to do?"

For answer I pushed his sword towards him with my foot.

"There is your sword," I said shortly, "and the regiment is in the village. You should know as well as I the meaning of that trumpet call. For the rest, Señor de Brito, I am glad that our paths lie for the present wide apart."

Still for a moment he glowered on me, relief struggling with hate upon his face. Then he stooped and raised his sword.

"You are a fool," he said slowly, sheathing his blade and hastily twisting a handkerchief round his wounded wrist. "A while ago I should have killed you without scruple."

"I am not an assassin," I said coldly.

"On your head be it, then," he answered sneeringly. "Only the matter does not end here, and if you live long enough there shall yet be a heavy reckoning be-

tween us. No, curse you!" he added with sudden passion, "you have not seen the last of Heitor de Brito." And with a look of baffled hate, he turned upon his heel. Long after the sound of his footsteps had died away in the woods I stood where he had left me, pondering upon the events of the last half hour.

Indeed, it was only when from the village there came another long-drawn blast sounding the "advance" that I roused myself to a sense of my surroundings. Then sheathing my sword, I quenched my burning thirst at the stream, and having freely bathed my face and hands and ascertained that the wound upon my neck was a mere scratch—scarce more than skin deep, indeed—I turned to leave the spot. Yet now that the fierce excitement of the moment was past and had given place to the inevitable reaction, I began to ask myself what I had gained by championing my lady's cause, and to count the cost of my interference. What was it to me that she should meet with insult, or that for her sake I should make for myself a ruthless enemy?

My present position was by no means so secure as I could have wished it to be. Here was I isolated from all assistance in this out-of-the-way village, with but a dozen troopers at my back, in the midst of a people notoriously hostile to us, and, for all I knew, a whole regiment of Jacobites in the vessel I had seen in the bay. The prospect was not encouraging.

And upon reaching the village I had an example of the effect that the presence of so small a number of my men remaining there produced, in the altered demeanour of

"He leaned against its knotted trunk, while the blood dripped steadily upon the grass"

the villagers themselves; for whereas before they had scarcely dared to show themselves in the street, now upon every doorstep and in the open space before the inn excited groups were gathered, above which sounded the shrill voices of the women and the low muttering of the men.

This clamour, indeed, fell to silence as I passed, but was renewed with double vehemence when my back was turned. To this, however, I paid no heed, but looking neither to the right nor left, I strode down the street, the excited groups making way for me readily enough at the sight of my grim visage and clanking sword.

I found that the sergeant had faithfully carried out my orders by withdrawing with his party to the inn, for I deemed that this latter building was the most capable of being held by a dozen resolute men in the event of their being besieged, though that fate should play them so scurvy a trick I did not anticipate.

Still, I determined that I would give my lady no single loophole by which she might contrive to outwit me. So true is it that a fool will pride himself on his acuteness even in the midst of his folly, though this lesson was more fully inculcated on my mind by subsequent events.

Conformable to the plan that I had conceived in my own brain, I took the sergeant aside and warned him to be strictly on his guard against surprise, arranging that two pistol shots in rapid succession should be the mutual signal of danger between us. But so comfortable was the aspect of the inn parlour, of which the troopers had already taken possession, and the welcome sight of the

familiar uniforms with their reassuring air of security, that again I was sorely tempted to remove my quarters thither also. Surely it was my pride only that prevented me.

Glancing through the open window, I saw a trooper bringing my horse from the stable, and again I cautioned the sergeant to look well to the safety of their own animals and to make certain that the liquor with which the troopers were served had not been previously tampered with.

"No fear of that," he said with a grin, pointing to two unopened casks of ale which they had already rolled into the room. "He will be a clever man who touches that whilst we are present."

Nevertheless, I could see that although as a soldier he was inclined to look down upon the villagers as a set of ignorant rustics, he was visibly impressed on hearing of the vessel I had seen, and I believed that I could trust him to look well to the safety of his party. With a few parting words to the men themselves, I mounted my horse and rode away.

Again as I clattered up the street I was the mark of all eyes, but I fancied that the groups showed more reluctance to make way for me.

At the door of the blacksmith's forge, round which were gathered some dozen of the hardiest men left in the village, I caught sight of Sampson Dare, towering a head and shoulders above the rest, and at the same moment his eyes met mine with a glance full of menace and defiance there was no mistaking. Yet I made as if

I did not see, and in accordance with my assumed air of indifference, with hand on hip and lightly humming a little air, I passed them by and so rode slowly to the manor. But here I could gain no information that would enlighten me upon the events of the day, though I spent an hour in pacing the terrace walks, keeping a watchful eye upon the house. From there I made my way to the cliffs; but though I gazed eagerly seawards, I could see no trace of the mysterious vessel of the morning. To the horizon the surface of the sea was bare of any sail.

Again I returned to the house, half hoping that I might yet find my lady waiting to tender me her thanks for the service I had rendered her in the wood.

But again I was disappointed; my lady was nowhere to be seen. And a few hours later that happened which drove all speculation upon her conduct from my mind. It was drawing towards ten of the clock, and I was lingering at the table after my evening meal, when I was startled by a loud and prolonged knocking proceeding from the direction of the main entrance.

So urgent, indeed, was the clamour that I sprang instantly to my feet, and thrusting the pistols which I kept ever handy into my sash, I caught up my sword and hurried into the hall. And this indeed so quickly, that ere any of the servants had reached the spot I had flung open the massive door.

Outside in the dusk was one of the troopers. He was panting heavily as if he had been running.

The sight of his face confirmed my forebodings.

"What is it?" I cried quickly.

"The horses!" he gasped.

"The horses?" I repeated sharply. "What of them? Speak, man!"

"Are gone!" he continued, leaning against the door post.

"Gone?" I cried incredulously. "Gone? Do you mean to tell me, man, that they could remove a dozen horses from the stable, from beneath your open windows, without you seeing them? You were drunk, you knaves!" I said fiercely.

"It is not true," he answered sullenly, recovering his breath somewhat. "And for the stable, 'tis a wooden shed. They had removed the boards at back—and the stalls are empty. But that is not all. For Long Marsden——"

"Aye!" I cried impatiently. "What of him?"

"He had gone to see how they fared, and——"

"Is missing, too?"

"No," he answered slowly; "he is not missing; but——"

"Where is he?" I cried, grasping the fellow's arm so that he winced.

"In the stocks!" he replied.

"In the stocks?"

I stepped back a pace or two and gazed at the man in blank astonishment.

"Aye," he added hastily. "He had been stunned as he entered the stable door. Ten minutes later we found him with a broken head in the stocks, and the key is missing!"

Still I could do nothing but stare stupidly at the fel-

low, until the silence following his words was broken by a low laugh from behind me. I turned quickly at the sound.

In the doorway upon my left, and so close that she must have heard every word between us, stood my lady. And at the sight of her a sudden rage possessed me.

"So," madam!" I cried passionately. "I believe I have to thank you for this."

I could not make out her face clearly, for she stood in the shadow of the doorway—only her white-robed figure and her sparkling eyes.

"For what, sir?" she replied in a voice in which amusement struggled with contempt. "For stealing your horses?"

"That and this other outrage!" I continued, striving to hide my mortification, and succeeding, I fear, but ill. "'Twas done by your orders and you know by whom."

Again she laughed mockingly, a laugh that stung me worse than any words of scorn.

"Would you question me as to their names, sir—with the flame of a candle?" she replied. "I have heard that is a gentle method of yours!" I remembered the sergeant's threat to the steward, and I coloured hotly at her words.

"No, madam," I answered when I could speak, "for I should as little expect truth from your lips as I should look to you for gratitude!" And without further words I turned and, closely followed by the trooper, ran down the steps.

Once in the road, however, I was forced to restrain my impatience and to slacken my pace, for the man beside

me was little used to running, and, moreover, was exhausted by his previous exertions. I questioned him closely, therefore, as to the details of what had passed. From this I gathered that just before their supper was served the man whom they called Long Marsden had taken a lantern and stepped across to the stables to see that all was safe there, as one or other of the men had done at short intervals throughout the evening. That at first his absence caused no uneasiness, but when ten minutes had elapsed and he did not return, their suspicions were aroused, and two of their number were sent to look for him. That they found the stable door bolted on the inside, and upon this being forced open, they found a great gap in the back wall of the shed, where half a dozen boards had been removed and the horses gone. More, the lantern lay upon the ground and a thin trail of blood led through the opening. This they had followed round the adjacent buildings until they came to the square before the inn. Here, in the shadow of the courthouse, they saw a dark mass huddled in the village stocks, which proved to be the body of the missing trooper. He was quite insensible, and was bleeding freely from a gash upon the forehead; and the stocks being secured by a heavy padlock, all their efforts to force it had proved unavailing.

And all this, be it understood, had happened within a hundred feet of the inn.

"But did you see no one, man?" I said at length.

"Not a soul," he replied. "The place might be deserted."

And upon reaching the village, I found this last statement fully verified; for the street lay empty and silent under the moon. Not a light showed in any of the houses on either side. All was darkness and silence.

And rendered even more uneasy by this ominous silence than by the open clamour of a few hours previous, I passed hastily up the street to where the moonlight fell upon a group of scarlet-coated figures gathered round the framework of the stocks.

As I approached the sergeant detached himself from the group and came to meet me.

"He is coming to," he said briefly, saluting.

I said no word to him, good or bad; but as they made way for me in silence, I knelt down by the side of the unfortunate trooper. He was half conscious, indeed, and moaned frequently as if in pain. A brief examination showed me that his wound was not so serious as it had at first appeared, and that it was more from the shock of the blow that the man was suffering. I next turned my attention to the stocks themselves. The upper or sliding portion was fastened to the lower by an iron hasp and staple, through the latter of which passed a heavy padlock, strong enough to resist all the efforts of the troopers' swords.

Presently I rose to my feet.

"Six of you follow me," I said shortly. And I turned and walked swiftly back to the blacksmith's cottage.

Upon the door of this latter I rapped loudly with the hilt of my sword. The noise went echoing down the silent street, and we stood waiting for what should follow.

Nevertheless it was fully three minutes before a window above was opened and a man thrust out his head.

"What do you want?" he said in a sleepy voice—assumed, I had no doubt. And I recognized him as one of the men whom I had seen with Sampson Dare.

"You!" I answered sharply. "To come down and open the door!"

"Open the door?" he answered. "A likely thing that! Who be you who come disturbing honest folk at this hour?" I would have you know I have a gun here for thieves, and——"

"Hark you, fellow!" I cried sternly, stepping out where the moonlight fell full upon my face, while six pistols covered him. "If the door be not open in two minutes I will blow in the lock and serve you as I served the steward yonder. Do you hear, you knave?" I continued fiercely. "You shall hang, on my word of honour!" For here I had no women to deal with.

Perhaps he read in my face that I should keep my word—perhaps the fate that had overtaken the steward's obstinacy decided him.

"Wait," he said slowly, disappearing from the window. Presently he opened the door.

"Now what do you want of me?" he said sullenly.

"To release the man," I said sharply.

"I have not the key," he replied.

"Ah!" I said slowly. "And how know you that we desired a key, my friend? Your own words convict you. No, no," I continued with a sneer, as he could find no words in answer; "you have not the key, of course,

and the village has not the key—but you have tools here, Master Blacksmith, and strong arms to wield them. So get you speedily what you require, if you would not swing at your own door."

In short, a few minutes later found us back at the stocks, and the blacksmith began his task. Nevertheless, so stout was the iron, that it required a full twenty minutes' filing ere the man was released from his unpleasant position. They carried him into the inn, and having seen him restored to consciousness and his wound dressed, I set about considering our position. As to who were his actual assailants the man himself could give no information, for he had been struck down ere he had advanced two steps within the stable. And the horses? 'Twas worse than folly to search for them by night, and by this time they were no doubt miles away, or hidden in some secluded spot amongst the torrs.

And both the landlord and his assistants swore so volubly that they knew nothing of the occurrence, for that they were serving the troopers at the time, that, strongly as I suspected them, I could prove nothing.

And so soundly rating the troopers for their carelessness, I returned presently to the manor, but not to rest. For I sat watching and listening at the open window, with my pistols at my side and sword unsheathed, until the first streaks of dawn were lightening the sky. Not till then did I throw myself upon my couch and court forgetfulness in slumber.

Ah, my lady, my lady! The game to be played out between us has opened in your favour! Who will secure the final trick?

CHAPTER IX

OF HOW MY LADY PLAYED DELILAH

Brightly the sunshine streamed into my little room on this the first of July, 1690, a day destined to become famous in the history of Ireland, and with its dawn to usher a new era into that misgoverned island.

I sprang from my couch with nerves braced for the duties of the coming day. I was not without some misgivings that I might find my own horse to be missing. But upon opening the stable door, there was the sorrel standing in the stall, apparently unharmed. And much relieved in my own mind as regarded his safety, I led him into the yard, and mounting, rode swiftly to the village.

Here I found the sergeant and his men awaiting my arrival and eager to commence the search for the missing animals. But I was not minded to leave the inn wholly unguarded, and, moreover, the wounded man was still weak from the blow he had received and the subsequent loss of blood, and was ill fitted to take part in what might prove an arduous undertaking. I left the sergeant and three men, therefore, to keep him company, all fully armed and this time alert enough against surprise, and with the remaining eight troopers at my heels commenced the search. The track of the horses led from the stables to a little stream some hundred yards away, and there abruptly ceased. As this stream came

from the torrs, I felt convinced that it was there we should look for them, probably hidden in some secluded hut, or in one of the many boulder-strewn hollows that lay amongst the hills. We turned our faces, therefore, in that direction, scattering on both sides of the stream and striving to pick up the lost trail.

But though we advanced some four miles thus, there was no sign of any tracks having left the water, and the farther we advanced, the wilder grew the scenery. Hitherto we had been ascending a series of gentle slopes, with scattered clumps of trees here and there, that grew into a dense wood on the summit of a hill immediately in front of us.

When we had descended into the valley beyond, we found ourselves completely shut in by the torrs, with nothing on either side of us but the desolate, treeless slopes with their monotonous covering of withered grass. And to add to our discomfort, the sun was gaining in power. Yet this, indeed, gave way presently to still wilder scenery than any we had yet met with; for what had before been mere hollows between the hills soon changed into deep glens, in any one of which a regiment might safely have been hidden away without discovery. Small wonder, then, that in diligently searching amongst these we soon became hopelessly lost; nor for all our endeavours could we again find the way by which we had come. Nay, more, we had so turned and doubled in the course of the last half hour that I was completely at a loss as to the direction in which Cleeve now lay. For all I knew every step that we advanced might be taking

us farther and farther away from it. And seeing this, about noon I called a halt in a deep glen, where an overhanging bank afforded us some protection from the sun, though the stifling heat of the hollow was well-nigh unbearable. And here we dined upon the scanty fare with which each man had provided himself before leaving the village, though in this respect my sorrel came but poorly off, for of water there was none. As for me, small appetite had I for food, being, indeed, a prey to the keenest anxiety. A hundred times I blamed myself for proceeding so far and for thus abandoning the little party at the inn.

What might not have happened in our absence? Granted they were well armed and forewarned against surprise, nevertheless, small chance had four men against forty, and 'twas not so much with force I feared they had to deal as guile.

Yet the day was wearing on, and here were we powerless to render them any assistance. I sprang impatiently to my feet, and leaving the troopers to their meal, I climbed the hillside above; for it was not improbable that from the summit I might obtain sight of some landmark that might give me a clue as to our whereabouts. But again disappointment awaited me. There was nothing to be seen but a ring of encircling hills, devoid, so far as I could see, of human habitation. With a bitter curse at my own stupidity I descended the hill, and again we set out in the direction in which I imagined Cleeve lay.

But this, it seemed, was but to entangle us worse amongst the hills; and for hours we wandered in a net-

work of narrow ravines, each of which exactly resembled its fellow, and seemed but to mock us by its similarity. Of our subsequent wanderings I prefer to say but little. It was not, however, until sunset that, footsore and weary, we arrived once more at the village.

No sooner did we come in sight of the inn than I was reassured as to the safety of the men I had left behind by the sight of the sergeant placidly smoking in the open doorway. In the street beyond a few rustics were standing at their doors, or chatted to one another across the street; and the whole scene was as peaceful an aspect as any village in England. Whilst the men were quenching their thirst with copious draughts of ale, I drew the sergeant aside and questioned him as to what had happened in our absence. It was in doing this that, glancing through the open window near which we were standing, I saw one of the troopers watering my horse in the yard. This done, he turned and led him towards the stable. But no sooner had he flung open the door than the empty bucket fell from his hand, and he uttered a shout that brought us running to his side. He was still standing, staring into the shed as if petrified.

"What is it? What do you see, man?" I cried as I approached.

"Look," he answered, pointing, with a white face, within. "They are there!"

I flung him aside and peered eagerly into the stable. I could not believe my eyes; for there, in the very place which we had quitted twelve hours before on our fruitless quest, a dozen horses were standing in the stalls.

"But they are gone, man! They are gone!" I stammered stupidly when I had recovered the use of my tongue.

"Aye, they are gone," said the sergeant laconically, "as you see."

But now as the fact of their reappearance became plain to all, from the weary, sweating troopers there burst such a chorus of profanity as caused the horses themselves to turn their heads in mild surprise. As for me, I leaned against the doorway, and the ludicrousness of the situation striking me, gave way to unrestrained laughter—laughter, however, which had in it more of relief than mirth. For consider for a moment the situation. Here was the mare's nest of danger that I had been raising to myself all day resolved into nothing more than a practical jest, designed, I had no doubt, by my lady to cause us annoyance.

While we had spent the day in tramping the countryside in useless search, the horses had been snugly concealed most likely in a cottage near at hand. The trick was humiliating, to say the least of it. On one point, however, it set me at rest. Surely they would not have returned the horses had they contemplated any sinister design against us. Nevertheless, in order to guard against a repetition of surprise, I bade two of the troopers sleep in the loft above the stable. And I also resolved to seek an explanation of my lady at the earliest opportunity.

Returning to the inn, I gave the sergeant a few further instructions, promising, indeed, to return again at

ten o'clock to see that all was done to ensure safety for the night; and this in the presence of the landlord, though the significance of this fact did not occur to me till long afterwards.

This done, I ordered my horse to the door, and arming myself ere leaving the inn with a weapon which I thought might prove useful in the coming interview that I promised myself, I mounted my horse and rode away.

Arriving at the manor, I found the same lifelessness there that had characterised it on the preceding day, but little I recked of this at the time, for my mind was fully engrossed in thinking what I should say to my lady and in speculating upon her reply. I dismounted at the stables and gave the weary sorrel into the charge of the youth Martin who was loitering there. As I flung him the rein, "See that he is ready saddled for me in an hour's time," I said quietly. For answer he made a wry face and moved away with a short, derisive laugh.

I stood gazing after him in undisguised astonishment. At any other time, when my mind had not been so preoccupied, I should have chastised the young boor for his insolence. As it was, I shrugged my shoulders contemptuously and turned away. Bah! 'twas only natural, after all. Like mistress, like man! I lingered for awhile upon the terrace, loth to go indoors, until the last purple tints faded from the western sky and the soft July night wrapped the house and gardens in its silent embrace. Anon, the full moon rose above Cleevesborough, silvering the surrounding oaks and streaking the grass with their checkered shadows. Presently with a half drawn sigh I

rose from the terrace wall upon which I had been leaning and passed slowly into the house. Within doors I met with the same monastic silence, though I found the candles lighted and my supper awaiting me in the dining hall; and laying aside my encumbering weapons, I applied myself to the dishes before me with all the zest of a starving man. When my hunger was appeased I filled my glass, and leaning back in my chair, gave myself up to my thoughts. And who shall say into what realms of fancy my thoughts strayed, or what dream faces of the future I saw in the flickering flame of the candles before me. Only I know that the dark eyes of my lady of Cleeve looked out at me, and her proud, elusive face stared at me from the shadows of the room. I strove to bring my mind back to the events of the past day, and the more convinced I became that the whole plot had originated in her fertile mind. For what object I had yet to learn. A glance at the clock convinced me that it was too late to seek an interview with her that night—tomorrow I would demand of her an explanation. And in the possession of that which I carried in my breast, I fancied that I should meet with some consideration at her hands. I roused myself at length from these reflections, and rising, took my cloak from the chair where I had laid it, and proceeded to buckle on my sword. This done I laid my loaded pistols upon the table, and raising my half-emptied glass to my lips, drained its contents preparatory to taking my departure.

"Captain Cassilis!" said a soft voice clearly.

I turned sharply at the sound. And at sight of the radiant vision before me, I caught my breath with a great gasp of wonder, and the glass fell unheeded to the floor and was shattered into a dozen pieces at my feet; for my lady herself was descending the stairs! My lady in a gown of brocaded satin, with a bunch of red and yellow roses in her hand. The low cut corsage that she wore displayed to full advantage the magnificent proportions of her bust, upon which diamonds flashed and sparkled in the light. Upon her gleaming hair was a large hat of pale blue velvet of the same colour as her gown and ornamented at the front with a massive silver clasp. Beneath this her eyes shone with a radiance that rivalled the jewels at her breast, and if 'twas not to Nature only that she owed the increased loveliness of her face, why then she was so exquisitely painted, that to the eyes of a plain soldier like myself its presence was undetectable. For the rest, one jewelled hand slightly raised the skirt of her trailing gown, affording a glimpse of the rich satin petticoat beneath and of a pair of high-heeled shoes with diamond studded buckles. And this portrait of my lady I carry ever in my mind through all the years; for of a truth never had she appeared so beautiful as on that night, when all the resources of art had been requisitioned to increase her alluring beauty and excitement had lent an added brilliancy to her eyes.

"Have I your permission to enter, sir?" she said softly, pausing upon the lowest step and gazing at me without apparently noticing my confusion. Only then did her words break the spell that held me tongue-tied. With a

great effort I strove to recover my composure, though my heart thumped painfully in my breast and I felt the hot blood mantling to my face.

"Madam," I stammered at length, "such permission in your own house is surely unnecessary. Especially," I added somewhat bitterly, "as I will not intrude my unwelcome presence upon you." And with a bow I flung my cloak over my arm.

"In that case, sir," she answered quickly, "I fear that the very object of my visit will be defeated."

"Your ladyship means——?" I replied, pausing in surprise.

"That it is to beg the favour of a few moments' speech with you that I am here."

"With me, madam?"

"With you!" she answered, smiling at my too evident astonishment, though not without some trace of embarassment in her manner.

I was silent out of sheer curiosity, for her looks, her changed manner towards me, puzzled me.

"Captain Cassilis," she said abruptly, "will you accept these few roses at my hands—in return for those which I so ungraciously flung away?"

And without waiting for my reply, she advanced with a soft rustling of her rich gown to the table and commenced to arrange them in a cut-glass bowl that graced the centre of the board.

As for me, I know that I stammered some reply, I scarcely remember what, for my eyes were fixed in open admiration upon her tall, graceful figure as she bent

above the flowers. From where I stood upon the hearth, slightly behind her, yet close enough for the scent of her clinging draperies to be wafted to me, I could mark the faultless curve of her waist, the bare, white shoulders, and beneath her velvet hat the heavy waving masses of her hair—maddening, bewildering hair, that with every turn of her lovely head glittered in the light with the sheen of burnished gold.

My lady indeed seemed unconscious of my scrutiny as she busied herself with her task, but I fancied there was a half smile upon her lips when she turned to me suddenly and said:

"But I have not yet acquainted you with the object of my intrusion. I should be guilty of worse than ingratitude if I did not thank you, sir, for the service you so timely rendered me yesterday. If I have withheld my thanks until now, it is not that I underrate its value, nor forget the peril that you risked on my behalf." And she flashed a glance at me that again set my heart beating rapidly.

"I beg that you will say no more, madam," I cried hastily. "Your words already far exceed any merit that you may consider attached to my action."

"I think that I am the best judge of that, sir," she answered, smiling.

"The man was insulting you, madam," I replied gravely. "In that I chanced to be in the wood at the time I count myself fortunate. Yet the meanest beggar maiden had claimed the like assistance at my hands."

"I thank you for the comparison, sir," my lady answered in a slight tone of pique.

"Your pardon, madam!" I replied humbly. "I fear that I put my meaning but clumsily, and with the language of the camp rather than of the Court. Yet, believe me—saving always my duty to the uniform I wear—my sword is ever at your service."

"And in these troublous times a good sword is more priceless than rubies," she said lightly. "Have a care, sir, that I do not take you at your word."

"I ask for no more, madam," I replied earnestly. "Be assured that you will not find it to fail you."

To this she answered nothing in words, but again she raised her lustrous eyes to mine. And by that glance I accounted myself amply repaid both for the danger I had escaped and for incurring De Brito's enmity; for if she had seemed beautiful before, judge how enchanting she now appeared, when all scorn and pride had vanished from her face and left her a very woman. Seeing her in this softer mood, I felt my courage rapidly returning.

"And I also have somewhat to say to you, my lady," I commenced after a moment's pause.

"Indeed?" she answered inquiringly. "But I fear that I detain you, sir? You were going out?"

"To the village, madam," I replied, "but that can wait."

And again I laid aside my cloak.

"Then you will not ask me to sit down, Mr. Cassilis?" she said archly.

"Madam," I stammered in reply, crimsoning with confusion, forgive my lack of courtesy. If I had for a moment thought, that——" And I hastily crossed the floor to where a large leather-covered chair stood against the wall. I was in the act of lifting this when, happening to raise my eyes to an oval mirror that hung above it on the oak-panelled wall, I caught the reflection of my lady's face behind me. And it was so changed, so stamped with a look of scorn and repulsion, that I dropped the chair I was raising and turned hastily round. Yet there stood my lady beside the table, gazing smilingly at me with sparkling eyes, so that I was fain to believe that my own had deceived me, or that the mirror by some trick had played me false. Without more ado, therefore, I raised the chair and returned to her side.

"Will you place it here for me, Captain Cassilis?" she said, moving with a click of her high heels near to one of the open windows. "Is not the night too lovely to miss enjoying?"

Obediently I placed my burden on the spot she indicated, and she seated herself, facing the open window. In truth it was a most lovely night. From where she sat a glorious vista was obtained of the broad, straight terrace, the sloping lawns, whitened by the moon, with the dark shadow of the woods beyond. And, rising above these latter, in the direction of the village, the massive, square tower of the church.

A momentary silence fell upon us as we gazed—a silence which was broken at length by my lady.

"And now that I am all attention, sir," she said lightly, "what is it that you wish to say to me?"

"Why, madam——" I began, and I hesitated awkwardly, all the fine speeches I had prepared beforehand vanishing on the instant from my memory, under the disconcerting gaze of her dark eyes. "What of the horses?" I ended somewhat lamely.

She gave a low, musical laugh, that went rippling through the room.

"As to your horses, sir!" she replied, "I have not heard that any one is missing."

"No, madam," I answered with what sternness I could muster. "True, there are none missing, but I fail to see what object there was in their abduction."

"When you had matched your cleverness against mine, sir?" she said quickly.

"I confess that I had not looked upon it in that light," I replied. "So to your ladyship I must ascribe their disappearance and for myself a day's toilsome search."

"I did not say so!" she answered, smiling.

"But you implied it, madam," I persisted. "I am as well assured that the plan itself emanated from your ladyship as I am that your servants carried it into execution."

"You would not have me incriminate them, sir?" she said quickly.

"There is no need, my lady," I answered grimly. "For you forget that it requires but a word from me to arrest them on suspicion."

"Then if I were you, sir," she replied in a low voice,

"I would be generous. The lion can well afford to spare the mouse."

"True, madam," I answered; "but when the mouse happens to stand six feet six, with a sword in due proportion, it behooves the lion to look well to his own safety!"

Again she smiled, but on a sudden her face became grave.

"I would not have any one suffer for what was, perhaps, a foolish trick," she said. "I pray you, sir—if, indeed, you meditate retaliation for the annoyance caused you—let the punishment fall upon me."

For a moment I stared at her without replying. The idea of any man punishing the lovely woman before me was well-nigh inconceivable.

"Reassure yourself, madam," I said at length. "Your servants will take no injury at my hands. Only there must be no recurrence of such a trick. My troopers are rough, and for one at least of their number it has proved but a sorry jest."

"Alas, poor man!" she answered.

"How, madam!" I cried incredulously. "You pity him?"

"Why not?" she replied quickly.

"Well—because I do not understand you, madam," I burst out.

"I am a woman, sir," she answered. "Is not that reason logical enough?"

"Yet a few days ago nothing would have been too bad to happen to them," I said bluntly.

"A few days ago, sir, I did not know many things that

I do now," she rejoined, toying with a rope of pearls that hung from her shoulders. "And in that I pity him, I do but make use of the prerogative of my sex. 'Tis the divine right of woman to be inconsistent."

To this I found no reply, and again we fell silent.

Suddenly my lady leaned forwards.

"Mr. Cassilis," she said winningly, "will you answer me a question?"

"If it is in my power to do so, certainly, madam," I replied.

"Then will you as a soldier tell me candidly what chance of success has James in Ireland?"

"My lady," I answered, after a few moments' pause, "you have asked me for my candid opinion, and giving that, I dare not buoy you up with false hopes. This only will I say, that the army which James has got together is as inferior in arms and discipline to that of William as the former leader's ability as a general is surpassed by the latter's military genius. One issue alone is possible—the downfall of the Stuart cause."

She remained silent for a few moments, digesting, I suppose, my words. On a sudden she looked up.

"You have seen much service abroad, sir?" she said inquiringly.

"Aye, madam," I made answer. "My sword has been drawn in many quarrels and has owned many masters."

"But always in the cause of honour, sir," she said quickly.

"Honour?" I rejoined. "Ah, madam, what have such as I to do with honour? Honour—a chimera—the dream

of fools! With me, that is the cause of honour which puts most guineas in my purse, be the right of the quarrel what it may."

"Oh," she said impulsively, "I could not live a life like that."

"Nay, madam," I answered quietly, "but you are a woman—a woman sweet and beautiful and pure—thank God for it!"

"A woman with a woman's wayward passions and sins," she replied.

"Ah, my lady," I answered, "sins?—you?"

She stopped me with a gesture of her hand. "How should you judge, sir, of a woman's responsibilities or errors?"

"True, madam," I replied with a sigh, "for I have known so few."

"But have you no relatives, Mr. Cassilis?" she said slowly. "Is there no sister or one more dear to you that looks to you for protection?"

"None, my lady," I answered sadly. "A sister, indeed I had, but——" I stopped, overcome by old memories.

"She is dead?" my lady said gently.

"Aye, madam," I replied. "She was murdered! Nay, nay, do not mistake my meaning. But—well, she was beautiful, madam, and was much courted on that account. Amongst the suitors for her hand was one—a favourite of the late King Charles—a profligate—devoid as much of all moral worth and honour as was his dissolute master. Yet to this man, with a woman's perversity, she gave

the preference. Madam," I continued in a low voice, "You will readily guess the sequel. They were married, contrary to all warning and advice. And the result, which all had foreseen, speedily followed. Within two months the libertine had wearied of his toy and of the restraints of wedlock. In a year she was dead, killed as surely by the man's brutal neglect as if he had run his rapier through her gentle heart."

I stopped, overcome by the emotion that my words had recalled to me, and stood staring at my lady, whose head was slightly bent, and whose long lashes swept her cheek.

Suddenly she gave a fleeting upward glance. "Forgive me," she said gently. "I did not know."

"There is nothing to forgive," I answered quietly. "Rather should I crave your pardon, my lady, for intruding so sad a story upon you. It is one ill suited for a lady's ears. I know not why I have told you." And I turned from her and gazed out into the night with eyes that saw not the moonlit gardens before me, but only the sorrowful, girlish face of one who had loved me well. I started when my lady's next words brought me to earth again. For the moment I had forgotten her presence in the room.

"And this man, sir," she said slowly, "what of him?"

"I killed him, madam," I answered quietly. "We met one early dawn in Spring Gardens, and he there paid to the brother that which he should have devoted to his wife. 'Twas that that drove me from the country and set me wandering over Europe these fifteen years. But I

forget that this story can have but little interest for you, my lady."

"Why should it not?" she replied. "Life is full of such sad stories." She leant her head on her hand, and for a moment or two we were silent. "I, too, am troubled to-night for the safety of one I love," she continued.

"Yes, madam?" I murmured as she paused.

"I allude to my brother," she said quickly. "Mr. Cassilis, you know well that a battle is imminent. Alas! my brother is a true Ingram, in that he is so rash. I tremble for his safety."

"I trust for your ladyship's sake that your fears are groundless," I replied, "and that you may welcome his return in happier times."

She smiled sadly by way of answer. And instantly my mind recurred to the bill of attainder passed against him. If, thought I, he is possessed of the same indomitable will as his sister 'twill be long ere he makes his peace with William. But I did not give expression to my thought.

"And yet," she said slowly, "I know not but that it is for the best that he is absent. Were he to know," she continued, with a swift, upward glance at me, "that we were—shall I say—prisoners in our own house, I know not of what extreme folly he might be guilty."

"And who could wonder, madam?" I answered, "or who could find it in their heart to blame him? What danger is there which a man beloved by you would not freely dare, and count the peril his highest privilege! What self-sacrifice for your sake too severe for one who loved you!"

"Loved me?" she said, shrinking.

"Yes, yes; who loved you!"

In my earnestness I had drawn near and laid one hand upon the back of her chair. She made no reply to my words, but I saw a slight shiver pass through her frame.

"Ah, madam, forgive me," I said hastily. "The window is open, and you are cold." And I made as though to close it.

"No, no, sir," she cried hastily, rising to her feet in sudden agitation. "Indeed you are mistaken. On the contrary," she added, raising her hand to her brow, "the room is very close, or I am not feeling quite myself. And I have left my fan in the garden. Will you permit me to fetch it, Mr. Cassilis?"

"Nay, madam, will you not rather permit me to perform this slight service for you, the while you remain quietly here?"

"I think that it is upon the fountain in the Rose Garden," she murmured. Then as with a bow I turned away, she added: "But I cannot so far trouble you, sir. I am overmuch in your debt already."

I had reached the window, but I turned at her words.

"A debt which you are repaying me in full to-night, madam," I said with a smile.

"Ah!" she cried, gazing at me with increased perturbation.

"Why do you say that, Mr. Cassilis? Why do you speak like that?"

"Because," I answered, returning her glance firmly, "by your kindness and trust in me to-night you more

than reward me for that which I have suffered at your hands. And I—I seek but to serve your ladyship, however humbly!" And I turned upon my heel and left her standing there.

CHAPTER X

OF HOW MY LADY PLAYED DELILAH—CONTINUED

As I crossed the broad terrace, looking neither to the right nor left, the moon flung my dark shadow upon the gravel path and the soft night wind stole through the silent gardens and fanned my face. But my eyes were blind to the beauties of the silvery landscape, light as day itself, and of the starry heavens above me; for it was my lady! my lady! ever my lady! that was my one recurring thought—the sum total of my reflections.

For the time being I was as one distraught, bewitched, indeed, by the spell her beauty had cast upon me. Wild, fleeting visions of the future rose before my eyes. With the fall of the Stuart the old order had changed; who knew what might occur under the new? A good sword coupled with brains might carry a man far upon the road to success in these unsettled times. He who was poor to-day might yet aspire to climb the ladder which led to fame, providing that he was prepared to grasp the means of rising or had wit enough to rightly use his opportunities. Many a man, indeed, dated the foundation of his fortunes to the Revolution, and received a title in reward for his services. Then why not I? The former requisite for success I knew that I already had. I believed that I possessed the brains, or the experience of years of wandering had been in vain. And after-

wards——? I had no settled purpose in my brain; all was a chaos, through which my lady's face alone shone, beckoning me upward.

That William would be successful in the coming struggle I had not the slightest doubt. I knew the man well, for I had fought under him in Flanders; and though, in the light of future history, he may not be considered as a great soldier in the same sense as were his contemporaries, Turenne and Luxembourg, yet he possessed a genius for snatching victory out of defeat. As for James, with the infatuated imbecility that characterised him throughout every great crisis of his career, he had taken no pains to keep up the discipline of his troops during the past winter, wasting his time with his so-called Court at Dublin whilst his army spread over the surrounding country, committing every species of rapine and plunder. One thing above all was plain to me: Ireland at the present time was the field that offered scope for a man's ambition. There, when blows would shortly be exchanged notice was to be won and promotion achieved. Little did I guess that the battle of the Boyne had already been lost and won, and that even now the mean-spirited James was in full flight for France, after reproaching his army with the cowardice which his own folly had principally engendered.

'Twas in meditating thus that I came at length to the entrance of the rose garden and halted beneath the arch of yew. Before me the fountain gleamed white in the moonlight that flooded all the open space surrounding

and flung fantastic shadows of the closely-cropped trees upon the grass. In the distance came faintly to my ears the murmur of the sea, and the gardens around me were full of the voices of the night.

I crossed quickly to the fountain, and even before I reached it I saw the object of my errand lying upon the marble basin. It was in all respects a dainty fan—a thing of painted silk and ivory, with the perfume of violets yet clinging to it, and with my lady's monogram in gold upon the handle. I lingered for a few moments, holding it in my hand, recalling again the face of its beautiful owner, and pondering upon our late conversation.

Then with a settled purpose in my mind, I retraced my steps by way of the terraces, and so to the house. I found my lady seated in the same room where I had left her. She looked up quickly when I entered and thanked me prettily in a few low-spoken words. The colour had deepened in her cheeks, and I noticed that the hand which she held out for her fan was slightly trembling. But I would have none of her thanks.

"Do not thank me, madam, for so slight a service," I said quickly. "I would do far more to pleasure your ladyship, a proof of which I am about to give you." I drew from my breast the folded paper, which I had placed there before leaving the inn. "This paper," I began slowly, gazing straight at my lady, who had risen in sudden agitation, "of which I took possession in this very hall, under certain circumstances that I doubt not are still fresh in your ladyship's memory, and that bore

a dangerous resemblance to conspiracy, is folded as you see it was folded when it came into my hands."

She did not seem to comprehend the full significance of my words or to grasp my meaning. I paused for a moment, and continued more slowly: "Am I wrong in supposing this paper to contain the names of a few gallant but misguided gentlemen who favour the cause of James?"

"You should best know, sir," she replied in a low voice.

"No, my lady," I answered quietly; "that is where you are wrong. I do not know the contents of this paper, because I have not opened it."

Still she gazed at me as if she did not understand. On a sudden she drew a step nearer, and I saw the colour fade from her face. Doubtless until this moment she had thought that I had already made use of it—had placed it in the hands of the authorities.

"You—you have not opened it?" she said in a troubled voice.

"No, madam," I answered. "Scarcely can I expect you to believe me, yet on my honour as a gentleman it is the truth."

"Then—then—you mean——" she faltered, resting both hands upon the table and leaning forward, probing my eyes as if she would read my soul.

I met her gaze unflinchingly.

"The names that this paper contains are known to you, madam?" I replied quietly.

"Yes," she whispered; and I saw that she was trembling.

"Then, my lady," I answered firmly, stepping to the table and holding the paper in the flame of the nearest candle until only a little feathery ash remained, "I give the lives of these gentlemen to you. Your secret is your own."

"You give them to me, sir?" she cried passionately. "You do this for me? Ah, Mr. Cassilis, why do you shame me so?"

"How, madam?" I said, totally at a loss to understand her words. "Shame you?"

"Yes, yes—shame me," she continued in the same passionate tone, "by this that you have done for me; by the forbearance that you have shown towards me—towards one who is unworthy——"

"My lady," I cried, "unworthy?"

"Oh," she continued, "if you would not believe in me; if you knew all—if you knew!" She broke off and laughed a trifle wildly. "Ah, forget my foolish words!"

"Say, rather, that it will be my happiness to remember them, madam," I replied gravely; though I confess that I was puzzled at her marked agitation, for which, so far as I could see, there was no adequate reason. "And do not think that I blame you for your devotion to the cause of James. Were there many among his adherents as courageous as yourself, we should speedily see the Stuart back at Whitehall. Though in the accomplishment of this object you have not my sympathy, yet the very boldness of the scheme by which you hoped to effect a rising in this county cannot but command my admiration. The very hopelessness of imagining that you

could succeed in the face of William's settled government would appeal to any soldier."

"And you who wear his uniform—you to whom these men were enemies—can yet find it in your heart to spare them?" she said in a low voice.

I took two steps towards her.

"Nay, do not credit me with a generosity which a nature such as mine is incapable of forming. A month ago I would have sent these men to death and recked little of the doing, save, indeed, to count it to my credit. Shall I tell your ladyship why I have not done so?"

She made a faint gesture of protest, but I took no heed and continued: "Because I knew that your name headed the list, madam." And I stopped, overcome by my own temerity.

She had moved to the window while I was speaking, and her face was turned from me. I could not guess what thoughts were passing through her brain, but I fancied that I saw her shoulders heave. Yet she made no reply, though I waited almost trembling for the words that did not come.

"I can feel but little sympathy for men who required a woman's name to stimulate them to action," I said at length. "On your part it was a brave deed to do, though a foolish one. Yet had I been in your place, doubtless I, too, should have considered that the end justified the means."

"Ah," she cried, turning swiftly to face me, "say those words again! Do you think that, Mr. Cassilis? Do you indeed believe that?"

"What, madam?" I answered, smiling.

"That—that the end justifies the means?" she said almost fiercely. "Surely that is true, is it not?"

"Providing always that the means employed be honourable, madam," I replied.

"And if not?" she cried quickly. "What if—if I—had given my word—had pledged myself to a certain course—then——"

"I think that the thing is too monstrous for supposition," I replied firmly. "That aught dishonourable and you could have anything in common is beyond conception."

Again she turned away to the window, and stood looking over the park. In the silence that followed it was not without a certain guilty surprise that I heard the church clock strike ten. Suddenly I remembered my promise to the sergeant.

"I regret that I must take leave of you, madam," I said hastily. I was unaware that the hour had grown so late."

"You must leave me so soon, Mr. Cassilis?" she said, with a reproachful glance. "I was hoping that you would tell me somewhat of your life abroad."

"And believe me sincere when I say that it is not from any choice of mine that I cannot stay to gratify your curiosity, madam," I replied. "To-morrow, should you be of the same mind, I shall count myself fortunate in relating the experiences of a life that has been mostly spent in roving the cities of the Continent. To-night it is impossible, for a soldier's first obedience is to duty."

"Do not let me detain you, sir," she answered somewhat coldly, turning slowly from the window and moving towards the stair.

"I trust, madam," I said humbly, anxious not to lose her good opinion, "that you are not offended by my abrupt departure?"

"How should that be, Mr. Cassilis?" she replied graciously. "Are we not friends?"

"I bowed low to conceal the exultation her words caused me, and then, taking my hat and cloak, I advanced to the table for my pistols. On a sudden I was startled by a low cry of pain from behind me. I turned swiftly at the sound. My lady had stumbled upon the lowest step and had fallen forward upon her hands. She recovered her feet almost immediately, but only to lean with half-closed eyes against the carved oak balustrade.

"Are you ill, madam?" I cried anxiously, crossing quickly to her side.

"No, no, it is nothing, sir," she gasped. "Only my foot slipped, and my wrist—I am afraid that it is sprained." And again a piteous little moan that was almost a sob escaped her lips.

"Let me summon assistance, madam," I said hastily, stepping to the door.

"No, no," she cried again, "I beg that you will not, sir. Indeed, it is nothing, and I would not alarm my—my sister."

"Yet I fear that you are in pain, my lady," I said, pausing irresolutely, my hand upon the handle.

"It will pass, sir," she answered bravely. "It is foolish

of me, and you will think me a great coward, Mr. Cassilis, but I would not cause unnecessary alarm; and if—if I may rest here for a moment, until this faintness is passed——"

As she spoke she moved somewhat unsteadily across the floor and sank again into the chair with a long-drawn, shuddering sigh she strove in vain to suppress.

I stood gazing at her, torn by conflicting emotions. It was growing late and I had already broken my word to the sergeant; yet, almost as if she divined my thoughts, she raised her head.

"Are you still there, sir?" she said in a low voice, with a quiver as of pain in it. "Ah, let me beg of you to leave me!" And she leaned her head upon her hand so that I could no longer see her face—to hide her tears, I fancied.

I flung my cloak and hat from me and returned slowly to her side. She was a woman and in pain. I could do no less.

"Since that you do not desire me to call your women, madam," I said hesitatingly, "if you would permit me to look at your wrist myself. I am possessed of some slight knowledge of surgery," I continued, growing bolder at her silence—"a knowledge acquired by many years' familiarity with wounds and sickness in foreign lands."

She did not make any reply to this, nor even a gesture of dissent. I waited for a few moments in silence.

"May I, madam?" I said at length, in a voice I strove to render steady.

"If you would be so good, sir," she murmured.

With my heart beating furiously, I sank upon one knee beside her and gently took her white hand in both my own strong brown ones. Gently as I raised it, however, at my touch I saw a tremor of pain pass through her.

It was with momentary surprise that as she turned her face swiftly towards me I noted there were no traces of tears upon her cheeks, but that her eyes were hard and glittering. Yet I was in no condition to remark upon this at the time, for the warm touch of her hand rendered me scarcely less agitated than she was for some reason herself. As I gazed at the soft, white wrist and jewelled fingers resting quietly in mine, in the silence of the room I could hear the loud beating of my own heart, and I know that my hands were trembling.

For now that I was in such near proximity to her, I fell beneath the spell of her wondrous beauty, as many a better man, I ween, had done before me. So close, indeed, was I, that a fold of her rich gown swept my knee—so close that I could mark every heave of her white bosom as it rose and fell stormily; and the perfume of her presence was in my nostrils.

In that moment, with the lovely, flower-like face in its frame of gold so close to mine, I forgot my promise to the sergeant—the lateness of the hour—the difference of rank—my duty—all!

Kneeling there at her feet, I would have given up honour, life—nay, my very hope of heaven itself, to do her pleasure. Madness, you will say. Aye, such madness

as moved the first unhappy parent of our race—madness which women will inspire till time shall be no more.

Something of what was passing in my mind must have appeared in my face, for my lady shrank back a little and made as if to withdraw her hand; and at that I bent my head to hide my tell-tale eyes and made a brief examination of her wrist. There was no sign of bruise upon the white, rounded arm—such an arm as Venus herself might have envied, where the blue veins meandered beneath a skin as soft as velvet.

"I do not think that the injury sustained is serious, madam," I said after a few moments. "Nevertheless, it were well to avoid using your hand as much as possible until it has been seen by your own physician."

As I was speaking, I took the silken scarf that I wore at my throat and deftly bound it round her wrist, in the manner that I had watched a little French surgeon do the like for me, when an unlucky fall from my horse had once kept my sword within its sheath for well-nigh a month.

"There, madam," I said in a low voice, tying the ends of the scarf into a bow, "I think that for the present, at least, that bandage will serve, for fault of a better one." And, moved by a sudden uncontrollable impulse, I raised her hand to my lips.

Again a quick shudder passed through her, and with a low, startled cry she snatched away her hand almost roughly and rose quickly to her feet.

And I rose, too, and our eyes met.

"Ah, forgive me, madam!" I said humbly. "I fear

that my roughness has hurt you. Yet God knows how willingly I would bear your pain."

"Yes, yes," she cried passionately, "I am in pain, but not as you think, sir. It is your solicitude for me, your generous care for me, that hurts me—that brands me to-night with shame. And yet—and yet—" she muttered, passing her hand across her brow, "you have said that the end justifies the means. They were your own words, sir."

"With a qualification, madam," I said quietly.

She raised her hand with a gesture of entreaty.

"Spare me!" she cried, with increased agitation. "Do not add by your words to the sense of infamy I feel. Perhaps even yet it is not too late—perhaps—ah!——" She broke off with a sudden gasp and I saw the colour had forsaken her face.

Thinking nothing but that the faintness had returned to her, I took a step hurriedly towards her. But in a moment I realised that she was not looking at me, but that her gaze was rivetted upon something behind my back.

I turned swiftly to glance at the open window. And there a sight met my eyes that caused me to pause in genuine astonishment.

I have already said that above the trees of the park rose the square Norman tower of the church; and now upon the summit of the tower a bright light suddenly flashed, that grew momentarily in volume, until a broad sheet of flame ascended into the sky. Some one had kindled a fire upon the church tower—for what? One

object, and one alone, was possible. It was a signal. And even as I gazed, upon the still night air came the sound of two shots fired in quick succession—aye, and following hard upon them a dozen straggling reports—and then silence. But with those reports the instincts of the soldier returned to me. There was danger, then—danger at the village—and I was not there to share!

I stood for a moment summing up all the possibilities of the situation; and in that moment a dozen or more lanterns broke from the woodland path that led to the village, and a little crowd of dark figures, with here and there the moonlight giving back the flash of steel, made straight for the terrace. At that my brain cleared with lightning rapidity, and turning swiftly, I snatched my pistols from the table.

Was it force of habit merely, or some dim suspicion of the truth that caused me to bend closer to look at them in the light of the candles?

A single glance was sufficient. The flints had been removed—the weapons were useless! I stood staring at them in dull perplexity; and then I raised my eyes and they fell upon my lady.

She was standing upon the hearth, erect and motionless, both hands pressed against her bosom, gazing at me with a strange expression, half fearful, half defiant, as if some secret struggle were raging in her breast. She did not speak; there was no need for words. In her face, her attitude, I received the full confirmation of my suspicions—read the truth in all its naked hideousness.

Now I remembered all too late that I had left my spare

flints in my holsters. Now I understood only too well for what purpose my lady had left her fan in the garden, who it was that had tampered with the weapons in my hands. With a sickening feeling of despair I realised that all this time she had been but playing a part, had been the lure to keep me from the village while they worked their will upon the men whom I commanded. Her graciousness, her altered demeanour towards me, had been but assumed—part of the snare into which, despite my boasted knowledge of the world, I had fallen as easily as any rustic Corydon.

On a sudden, still with her eyes on mine, my lady slowly raised her injured arm. Slowly, slowly, she raised it, then with a quick, passionate gesture she tore the bandage from her wrist and flung it into the empty grate behind her. That broke the spell.

With a long-drawn, shivering breath I recovered my composure. "God forgive you, madam," I said quietly; "for I believe that you have sent me to my death." And without further word or glance at her, I threw my useless pistols upon the floor at her feet, and, drawing my sword, stepped through the open window. But as I set foot upon the terrace I realised to the full my danger; for upon turning to the left, intending, if possible, to reach the stables, I saw the steward and the youth Martin advancing from their direction, and the moonlight shone upon the barrels of the muskets in their hands. They raised a shout at my sudden appearance, but they dared not fire, for I was between them and their friends advancing from the opposite end of the terrace, who now,

indeed, were within a hundred feet of me. And before me was the moat, which even if I could by any means clear (and my heavy riding boots rendered the chance more than doubtful), to cross the open lawns exposed to their shot was but to court certain death.

Moreover, small desire of escape was there in my heart; for so stung was I by the knowledge of my lady's treachery and of my own disgrace, that I was minded to die rather, and so to hide my shame. How after this could I face my comrades, with the knowledge that I had betrayed the trust reposed in me, and, despite my age and experience, had been tricked, cozened, cheated by a woman, like the veriest country clown.

A little to my right two buttresses projecting from the wall offered security from all save a frontal attack. Between these I ensconced myself and awaited my enemies with the desperate determination of selling my life as dearly as possible. In a moment they were around me—a score or more of the hardier rogues from the village, armed for the most part with pitchforks and scythe blades lashed to poles, and led by Sir Rupert Courtenay, my lady's cousin.

Seeing me standing there, stern and motionless, they came to a sudden halt, and the shouts with which they had before greeted my appearance died away to silence.

"Give up your sword, sir," said the young baronet sharply. "Your troopers are in our hands and resistance is futile."

At that I put aside the thrust of a scythe blade from the man who was nearest to me, at the same time slash-

ing him across the wrist, and as the knaves drew back a little, not relishing their reception, I condescended to give him an answer.

"On guard, sir," I said through my set teeth. "Unless, indeed, you prefer to stand by and let your followers murder me. Undoubtedly it is your safest course."

For a moment he hesitated, thinking, I make no doubt, of the fair girl who awaited him within the house, or perhaps he knew my reputation with the sword, that had made older men pause ere provoking me; but the sneering laugh with which I accompanied my last words caused him to flush with shame, as I had so intended.

"By heaven, no!" he burst out. "If you are bent on being killed, captain, I will oblige you. And you others, stand back. I have already an account to settle with this gentleman."

And as, obedient to his command, they drew back a little on either side, leaving us a clearer space to wield our weapons, he sprang impetuously forward, and our blades clashed together. Yet scarcely had we exchanged a dozen passes ere my lady's voice rang high above the music of our swords.

"Do not kill him! do not kill him!" she cried.

Whether it was that her sudden appearance within the circle, or that the events of the night had unstrung my nerves and robbed my hand of its cunning, I do not know. But on a sudden my sword wavered, and in that brief instant my opponent's blade slipped within my guard and his point pierced my left breast. Yet still for a moment I did not fall. I staggered, indeed,

against the wall, but my brain was so clear that the whole scene was printed indelibly upon my memory. The moonlight falling upon the ring of encircling faces, the young baronet staring stupidly at his encrimsoned blade, scarce crediting his victory, and, lastly, my lady's white, stricken face, as, wide-eyed, she gazed at the fast reddening circle on my breast.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the sharp click of her fan as it fell upon the gravel walk.

"Madam," I said huskily, taking two steps toward her, with earth and sky rocking in one red mist before my eyes, "you have dropped your fan; permit me to restore it to you." And I fell heavily at her feet.

CHAPTER XI

OF WHAT BEFELL ON THE TERRACE

It was dark when my senses deserted me; it was still dark when they returned amidst the accompanying roar of the battlefield. I was stretched at full length upon the ground, pressed down by some heavy weight that rendered me powerless of moving hand or foot. Dimly through the black pall of smoke that enveloped me I thought that I recognised the outline of my old charger Gustavus, who had borne me in safety through the perils of many a stricken field, to meet his death at last amidst the rout of Teneffe. So it was Teneffe then! And yonder, where the fire flashed redly, that was the village itself, fired by the Dutch in that last charge in which a spent cannon-ball had struck me down. Aye, I could see them now—a dense mass of men, fighting, struggling, swaying to and fro amidst the blazing ruins of the hamlet. More, I could see Conde's veterans—victors of Naerden, Rhimberg and the Rhine, recoiling before the berghers and traders of the Netherlands. Nearer to me, upon an eminence some five hundred paces distant, a battery of French artillery added their iron tongues to the increasing roar of the field. Faintly, whenever the smoke drifted, I could see the gunners working madly at their pieces; but as the retreat of their comrades before William's stolid infantry developed rapidly into a

rout, the guns ceased firing one by one, and limbering up, they advanced at a gallop upon the spot where—totally incapable of movement—I lay full in their path.

I struggled vainly to rise—a mountain seemed to press me down. I strove to cry out, but no sound came from my parched lips. Nearer and nearer, swifter and swifter, they swept down upon me, in one fierce tempest of maddened horses and shouting men, with the great guns swaying behind them. Now, so close were they, that I could see the wild, straining eyes of the horses and the blackened faces of the gunners, who lashed their teams to frenzy. Now with a trembling of the ground beneath me—a nightmare of blood-red beasts and giant riders—they were upon me, over me. With a despairing cry I flung out my arm and awoke to a full consciousness of my surroundings.

I drew a deep breath and lay for a time gazing up at the ceiling overhead, until the noises in my head gradually subsided, and I became conscious of a fierce throbbing in my left shoulder, that most effectually brought back the events of the previous day to my memory. Glancing downwards, I saw that my arm was supported in a sling upon my breast. At that I rose with an effort upon my right elbow and, despite the feeling of faintness that oppressed me, took a rapid survey of my surroundings. Clad only in my shirt and breeches, I lay upon a bed of rugs in a room that I had never previously seen. In what part of the manor it was situated I could not form a guess, but from its appearance I judged that it was used for little else than a lumber room.

Beside my couch my eyes lighted upon a tray, whereon was set a flask of spirits, put ready there, I opined, 'gainst my awaking. I reached for the flask and drank deeply of its contents. It was cognac—in quality the best—and with the generous spirit I felt my strength return to me and the life blood course swifter through my veins. Presently I staggered to my feet and moved somewhat unsteadily in the direction of the window. It was guarded by three massive iron bars let into the solid masonry, and of such a thickness as to effectually preclude all possibility of escape in that direction. My prison was in the left wing of the house, for below me was the stable yard, with the stables themselves directly facing me. No one was about, so that taking this fact, together with the coolness of the morning air into consideration, I judged that the hour was yet early. Ah, but it was good to breathe the fresh sea breeze into one's lungs, to watch the sunlight dancing in the courtyard, and the white, fleecy clouds chasing each other overhead.

I next turned my attention to the wound upon my shoulder, striving in so far as I was able to ascertain the exact extent of injury inflicted. To my surprise and gratification, upon slipping my arm from the sling which supported it, I found that I could move it with tolerable freedom, and with no very great addition to the pain that I already endured.

Presently I made the discovery that the sling itself belonged to me—was, in fact, no other than the very scarf which I had bound around my lady's wrist. Up till that moment I had been so absorbed in examining my

prison, that I had lost all recollection of the means which had deprived me for the time being of my liberty. But now at the sight of this scarf, bringing back in a flood of memory all my lady's treachery and my own humiliation, I fell into so fierce a rage as surely never woman roused in man before.

In a sudden access of unreasoning passion I tore the silken sling from around my neck and ground it savagely beneath my heel. Oh, for one hour of liberty! One hour of revenge upon this woman who had beguiled me to my undoing! One hour to break that haughty spirit—to bend, to crush, to bring her grovelling upon her knees for pity! Pity? If that the time should ever come that I could repay her for the present shame I felt by striking her through those she loved, then let her not look for any pity at the hands of the man whom she had wronged, for by all I held most sacred I would not spare her!

After awhile, oppressed by a feeling that I could not breathe, I moved again to the window, that the cool sea breeze might play upon my burning forehead.

"Good-day to you, general," said a mocking voice. "Will your lordship be pleased to require your horse this morning?" I glanced swiftly down.

Below me in the courtyard was the youth Martin, and behind him the grinning faces of the other two stable hands. All three carried old-fashioned muskets in their hands, with more or less rusty swords strapped to their waists. Evidently my prison was well guarded.

I stepped hastily back from the casement, yet not so

quickly but that I caught the jeering laugh with which the words were accompanied. It was this laugh more than the insolence of the words themselves that stung me once more to sudden rage; and I fell to pacing the floor in a frenzy of impotent passion.

Doubtless my lady had taken a pleasure in relating to all within the house the manner in which the poor dupe had fallen into her snare—aye, and had laughed—laughed with them over my discomfiture! The latter thought was maddening.

I stopped in my walk, and in order to seek any distraction rather than to dwell further upon my shame, I set to work in feverish haste to examine the lumber that the room contained, in the hope that I might discover some weapon with which to arm myself. Though to what purpose, seeing that I had no strength to use it, even if I had stumbled upon that which I sought, I did not stop to reason. But there was no weapon of any description to be found. Books there were in plenty, old tapestry and pictures, china and odd-looking furniture, in shape such as I had never previously seen, and all bearing the same mark of extreme age.

Presently I desisted from my search and again peered cautiously out of the window. The two louts still lingered in the doorway of the stable opposite, but the youth Martin had disappeared. Even as I stood watching the men before me somewhere within the house a door banged to loudly, and there came the sound of footsteps nearing the room in which I was confined. At that I reseated myself upon the chest and strove to regain my

ordinary composure, for I was determined that my gaolers should not be witnesses of how deeply I felt the shame of my present position. The footsteps ceased in the passage without, a key was thrust into the lock, and a moment later the heavy door swung open, disclosing the figure of the steward.

"You are to follow me," he growled, with a sour smile.

"Whither?" I asked curtly.

"That you will soon know," he replied, with all his old hatred of me looking out of his eyes. "Come—no more words."

"I will know now, or I do not stir from this room," I said stubbornly. "Hark you, Master Steward, I have asked you a civil question and I await your answer."

"What if I refuse?" he growled. "I have it in my power to compel you."

"You may use force if it so please you," I answered boldly, snatching up the stool upon which I had been sitting.

"But in that case I warn you there will be more than one head broken ere I am removed."

For a few moments we faced each other in silence, and he half turned, as though he was about to summon assistance, but apparently he thought better of it, or my resolute attitude daunted him, for again he hesitated.

"Very well, if you must know," he said with a grim smile, "to my lady, then."

"Ah!" was all I answered, though I felt my heart quicken.

"And now I hope you are satisfied," he continued, his

former insolent manner returning. "So come, let us have no further waste of time."

"What, as I am?" I cried quickly, remembering on a sudden the scantiness of my attire. Even the shirt I wore had been partly cut away to enable them to dress my wound. "Where is my uniform, you rascal?"

"Burnt!" he answered sneeringly. "And I have no orders to play the part of tailor."

"To the devil with your orders!" I cried in a rage. "Get me some clothes, fool! Would you have me appear before ladies in this guise?"

Still for a moment he hesitated, then, "Wait," he said briefly. And he went out, locking the heavy door behind him. When the last sound of his footsteps had died away, I commenced to pace the floor in some agitation. So I was to see my lady then? In good sooth I had need of all my composure to face the coming interview. Not for the world would I have her see that any words of hers had power to move me. Not for the world would I give her cause to triumph at my humiliation. Rapidly I shaped out in my own mind a course of conduct to pursue and had reduced my face to a state of impassiveness ere, after the lapse of some ten minutes, the steward's returning footsteps again became audible.

This time he carried a bundle in his hand, which he flung as carelessly at my feet as one might fling a bone to some stray cur.

I turned it over with my foot. It was a coat of coarse brown cloth such as any groom might wear, and reeked indeed most vilely of the stable.

"Pah!" I said in disgust. "Is this the best you can find me, man?"

"Best?" he cried impatiently. "Aye, and too good at that, since it comes from the back of an honest man. But make your choice and quickly! Either you come of your own accord or we will drag you there. Time presses. Which is it to be?"

I saw that the knave would keep his word, and now that I knew my destination I was in no mind to appear before my lady in so undignified a fashion. I bade him sharply then to hold his peace and to assist me in donning the coat—of which a closer inspection lent but an increase to the repugnance I felt in wearing. This, indeed, seeing that it was impossible owing to my wound that I could accomplish of myself, he presently did, though with much muttering the while, of which I took no heed.

Even then I was forced to again resume my sling and to fasten the one empty sleeve upon my breast, for I found that I could not yet force my arm within it, owing to the latter's stiffness. This done, I turned to the steward.

"I am ready," I said curtly. "Lead on, my friend."

He looked at me with a cunning smile. "Not so fast," he answered, stepping quickly into the passage and drawing a pistol from his breast. "You will go first, if you please; and play me no tricks, for I am armed, as you see, and I have a good memory."

In truth, I saw that the knave would only be too glad to revenge himself upon me, so I shrugged my shoulders in-

differently and turned along the passage in the direction he indicated.

In this order we proceeded, then, until we reached the entrance hall. Yet still the lout behind me pointed forward, and we passed out of the main door, and so into the open air.

But it was only when I was descending the steps that I fully realised the scene, and the meaning of the shouts that I had heard became plain to me. For on my right, at the end of the terrace, where three broad steps led down on to the grassland bordering the main avenue, was a little group of some half dozen persons, among whom my eyes lighted almost immediately upon the tall figure of my lady.

Below them, upon the grass, the whole of the villagers, men, women and children, seemed to have gathered; and a clamour of derisive shouts greeted my appearance.

Beyond bestowing one look of contempt upon them I took no heed, but calling all my fortitude to my aid, with head erect and with a firm step I passed along the terrace to where my lady awaited me.

As I approached nearer I scanned the persons before me more closely. With some at least I was already acquainted. There was Mistress Grace, who eyed me, I thought, with a glance that bespoke more of pity for my forlorn condition than of triumph at the successful issue of their enterprise. Near to her was my late adversary, the young Sir Rupert Courtenay, and three or four of the neighbouring gentry, all of whom I knew to be of the Jacobite persuasion; while at the head of the steps,

with a grim smile upon his face, stood the stalwart figure of Sampson Dare. But it was with more curiosity that I gazed upon the two men with whom my lady herself was conversing. They were seated at a small table, a bottle and glasses before them, and a more villainous pair of rogues it has seldom been my lot to set eyes upon. He who seemed to be the spokesman was dressed in a voluminous skirted coat of blue, adorned here and there with tarnished bold braid. Beneath this was a faded silken vest, and I caught a glimpse of a brace of pistols garnishing the broad belt at his waist. His legs, like those of his companion, were encased in high sea-boots that reached all but to his thigh, and upon his head was an old-fashioned three-cornered hat. In years he might have been anything from forty to sixty, but his brown mahogany face was so scarred and wrinkled that it gave no clear indication as to his age. That he was a seaman I saw at a glance, and my mind instantly reverted to the vessel I had seen in the bay. His companion was a tall, gaunt man, dressed in a coarse blue jerkin and with a red cotton cap upon his head. For the rest, both these worthies wore heavy gold earrings and carried long swords at their sides. Master and mate I took them to be, and as it subsequently proved, my surmise was correct.

At length I came to a halt, I caught the words which he of the blue coat was addressing to my lady. "No, no," he was saying in a harsh voice that was well in keeping with his whole appearance, "have no fear on that score, mistress. They shall be treated like gentle-

men. Curse me! like gentlemen. No more humane a man than I am ever set sail from Bristol port, as Silas Ball here will tell you."

Here he looked across at the mate, who grinned broadly, as at some excellent jest—a jest which at the time I failed to comprehend, though afterwards I came to experience more of the former gentleman's humanity.

"Given a fair wind, in two days' time they will be—— Is this the man?" he added abruptly, setting down his half-emptied glass and bending his brows upon me.

Up till now my lady had been standing with her back to me, but at these words she turned, and we were face to face. For it may be twenty seconds we stood thus, my lady proud and cold, I with a tumult of conflicting emotions in my breast, in which a rapidly rising rage against her treachery was the more predominant. At once the clamour around us was stilled into the silence of a great expectancy.

"This is the man, Captain Barclay," my lady said quietly. Then, with her eyes still upon mine, she added: "I trust, sir, that your wound is on a fair way towards recovery?"

"Madam," I answered bitterly, striving to control the passion in my voice, "awhile ago you accused me of hypocrisy in that I pitied you. I think that the accusation might well be reversed. You have openly rebelled against the government, you have defied the royal authority, and, for all that I am aware, have slain the troopers under my command, and, lastly, you have deprived me, a king's officer, of my liberty by such base

trickery as only the heart of a woman could conceive. You should have been an actress, madam, had fate not willed you to be born a lady. I congratulate you. Satan himself might take lessons from you in deceit!" For a moment she did not speak, and I saw the colour deepen in her face.

"I fought you with a woman's weapons," she answered coldly—"your manly wit against my woman's beauty. If I succeeded, you have but yourself to blame."

"You say true, madam," I cried hotly. "For falsehood, flattery and guile—those are, indeed, a woman's weapons—not a gentleman's!"

"Then by your own words, sir," she replied icily, "you do but prove the truth of my assertion."

"As to the sequel of your scheme, madam," I continued, "the shame of it rests rather in success than failure. To your own conscience I leave it to justify your conduct. But I have little doubt that long practice has rendered your ladyship proficient in the art of deception to which I fell a victim."

She threw back her proud head and gazed at me with flashing eyes. "And do you imagine, sir, even for a moment, that the part I degraded myself into playing was an easy one!" she replied scornfully. "To expose myself to the shame of your approval?"

"No, madam," I answered sternly. "There you are wrong. For a man's honest admiration, however humble his station in life, carries no shame to the woman who inspires it—were she the highest in the land."

"Oh, sir," she cried ironically, "spare me your sophis-

try; for honesty coupled with your name is too incongruous. And let me take this opportunity of informing you that thanks to your credulity the army of France, so long delayed, may land in safety on our shores to-night; and thus, sir, indirectly, you have hastened the first step that restores the Stuart to the throne."

Then raising her voice so that all might hear: "God save King James!" she cried clearly; and the cry was enthusiastically caught up both by the gentlemen upon the terrace and the waiting crowd below.

"And you tell me this, madam?" I said in a choked voice when the clamour had died away.

She turned upon me with a scornful smile. "If you think that you can make use of the information, sir, you are welcome to do so," she replied. "But I think—and these gentlemen will bear me witness—that your present position is scarcely to be envied." And she mocked me. Standing there in the pride of her power and her beauty she mocked me—I, a weak and wounded prisoner!

"And you are wounded, too," she continued pitilessly, "and by one scarce more than a boy—a boy!" she added with intense scorn. "I think if I remember right, sir, that you offered me the service of your sword. When I require such service from any man on my behalf, it shall be from one who has the wit and strength—aye, and skill enough to handle it."

I stood trembling and dumb before her, gazing from one to the other of the ruthless, mocking faces around

me, and back again to my lady's scornful countenance. Yet was there no real cause for me to wonder at her present mood; for deep down in the heart of every woman—aye, even in the very best of them, there is an innate well of cruelty, a delight in inflicting pain upon our sex, which, it may be, is engendered by their physical inferiority. It was at this moment that, as with a sense of utter loneliness I faced my encircling enemies, a sudden faintness seized me. I know not whether it was due unto my wound, or whether all that I had passed through had overtaxed my strength, but I staggered back against the terrace wall. Yet even in that moment I was not so far unconscious but that I heard an exclamation of pity escape the lips of Mistress Grace.

"Madam," I gasped hoarsely—I could bear no more—"let us end this. Kill me if you will, but for God's sake end this!"

"You are right, sir," she answered quickly. "I will end it, and spare myself the further insult of your 'honest admiration.' There are depths below depths of infamy and shame. But if admiration is based upon kindred qualities of spirit, I can conceive no greater degradation than to be the object of your passion." Yet as she spoke I saw that the colour had forsaken her face and she pressed her hand against her side, as if in sudden pain. Aye, others saw it too, for, "Lettice, you are ill!" her sister cried, hastening to her assistance. But my lady put her aside.

"No, no," she cried passionately. "It is nothing—nothing! Is not this the hour of my triumph? And

shall I not take it? Shall I not——" She broke off abruptly with a slight shudder, then with a sudden change of manner she ran to the terrace wall and beckoned to the expectant crowd below.

"Look there," she cried fiercely, flinging out her arm towards me. "There is the man before whom for many days we have cowered and trembled, who has held our safety and our lives in the hollow of his hand; there is the man who has called himself our master—our master—yours and mine—mine! Look well upon him now!"

A fierce shout answered her words and the crowd pressed forward to the foot of the steps with menacing cries and curses, in which the voices of the women joined the loudest.

"Give him to us!" a voice shouted, and the cry was quickly caught up and repeated. "Aye, give him to us! To the cliffs with him!"

"To the cliffs, say you?" cried a wild-eyed woman shrilly, darting up the steps and endeavouring to push her way past Sampson Dare. "To the gallows with him! 'Twas such as he that hung my boy to the sign-post of the inn for following King Monmouth! Aye, and played their drums the while to drown his dying cries! This for you—butcher!" She flung a clod of earth that struck me full in the face, and above the fierce shout of approval that greeted her words, mingled with those of "butcher!" and "to the sign-post with him!" I heard my lady give a hard, cruel laugh at my discomfiture. Stung more by this than all the in-

dignities heaped upon me, I rallied all my strength and faced them squarely at the head of the steps.

"Peace, you hounds," I cried sternly. "You who yelp so loudly now for James would, at a turn of Fortune's wheel, bark louder still—for William! Not with such as you have I to deal. But for you, madam!" I cried hoarsely, turning to my lady, who stood pale and erect, her eyes shining with defiance and a light I could not read—"you, who knowing better, lure these senseless hinds to ruin with a cunning worthy of yourself and of your cause—to you, I say, the debt between us is no light one. Look to yourself in the day that I repay you for this morning's work!"

In the vehemence of my passion my wound reopened, and with the world receding from my fading vision I fell back senseless in the arms of Sampson Dare.

CHAPTER XII

OF THE GENTLEMAN ABOARD THE GOOD SHIP "PRIDE OF DEVON"

For exactly how long my swoon lasted, to this day I can but hazard a vague conjecture. But with returning consciousness I found myself lying upon a heap of straw in the stable I have before mentioned, with the steward bending over me busily engaged in re-bandaging my wound. Beyond him, near to the doorway, lounged Sampson Dare, and in the yard without I caught a glimpse of three or four servants belonging to the manor, all of them fully armed, and of the youth Martin holding the bridle of my own impatient sorrel.

"So, so," said the steward grimly, upon seeing me open my eyes. "King William is spared the mourning for a valiant servant."

"And the devil has lost his own—as yet," added Sampson Dare with a grin.

I closed my eyes for awhile and lay silent; for the sunlight without dazzled me, and I was conscious, moreover, of a feeling of intense weakness, by which I imagined that I must have lost a quantity of blood—which was, indeed, the case.

When the man beside me had completed his task, even to replacing my arm within its former sling, all of which, to his credit be it said, he accomplished with no

undue harshness, he thrust a flask of spirits in my hand and bade me curtly, "Drink."

In this, indeed, I was the more ready to obey him, since not only was I afflicted with an intolerable thirst, but also the events of the past few hours recurred swiftly to my memory, and I was minded to uphold my dignity and conceal the weakness that I really felt in the presence of the men before me. Deeply, therefore, I quaffed of the cognac which the flask contained, drinking in with it an increased vitality and such returning strength that presently I was enabled to stagger to my feet.

"That is better," said the steward, nodding approvingly, as I was fain to lean for a moment or two longer against the wall to recover from the sudden faintness which the effort had entailed; "for the day wears on apace, and 'tis time we should be moving."

"Whither?" I gasped hoarsely, glancing from his face to that of Sampson Dare.

"Ah, you will see time enough," the latter made answer. "A pleasant journey to you, with good company!" and he grinned broadly.

"Come, come, we waste time," said the steward impatiently, at the same time beckoning to Martin to bring my horse nearer. "Can you mount?" he added, turning abruptly to me.

At that I rallied all my strength, and disregarding his proffered arm, I stepped—somewhat unsteadily, I will admit—through the open doorway to the sorrel's side, who turned his head at my appearance and whinnied softly in gentle recognition. But the sight of the animal

was as if I had found an old friend, and it was with a renewal of hope that with Sampson Dare's assistance I climbed heavily into the saddle. Yet if some wild scheme of escaping had for a moment crossed my mind it was speedily doomed to be disappointed; for, with the steward leading the sorrel by the bridle and with the other men forming in a little cluster around me, I was forced to admit to myself, however reluctantly, that any idea of regaining my liberty was for the present at least impracticable.

Nay, more, as my eyes, travelling from face to face of the group around me, encountered those of Sampson Dare, as if reading my thoughts, he significantly patted a long barrelled pistol in his hand. No, the odds were too heavy against me in my wounded state, and so, with a slight shrug, I resigned myself to waiting for what should follow.

In this order, then, we left the stables behind us and moved slowly towards the entrance gates of the manor. Upon turning the corner of the house, we came once more in full view of the terrace and of the crowd that still gathered thickly upon the grass below. Eagerly I looked towards the scene of my late humiliation.

The gentlemen still lingered upon the terrace and the two seafaring men awaited our appearance at the foot of the steps and immediately made their way towards us; but of my lady herself or of her sister I could see nothing. And at this I was greatly relieved, for of a surety I had not courage enough left to me to sustain

with dignity another interview such as that through which I had lately passed.

As for the waiting crowd, doubtless it would have gone hard with me at their hands had I not had the escort of Sampson Dare and the other stout rogues by my side for my protection; or it may be that my lady had herself issued stringent orders as to my safe conduct; for though upon catching sight of me they immediately thronged around us, yet they contented themselves with calling down curses upon me, and beyond this, offered no violent opposition to our progress. Indeed, they came no farther with us than the gates of the manor, and upon turning into the road, we were left to proceed on our way alone, save for the company of the two seamen who followed close upon our heels, ever and anon breaking out into a lusty chorus, which they sang at the full strength of voices, rendered not too steady by the spirits they had been freely imbibing. 'Twas a doggerel verse at best, nathless possessing a jingle that even in the midst of the anxiety I felt as to my position persistently forced itself upon my memory:

"Then a fig for a landsman's life, my lads—
And a cheer for the Spanish Main!
With the still lagoons and the bright doubloons—
And the black-eyed maids of Spain, my lads!
Oho, for the maids of Spain!"

To this accompaniment we arrived in no long time at the village, and passing slowly down the deserted street, wended our way to the little stone jetty that lay behind the court-house; that is, all save the two worthies who

had followed us, who stopped to further refresh themselves at the inn.

Swiftly I glanced seawards. Less than a mile off shore lay the mysterious vessel I had seen from the cliffs; and the sight confirmed the suspicions I already had in my mind as to my further destination. Moreover, as, obedient to a curt command from Sampson Dare, I slowly dismounted on the pier, I took occasion of the steward to inquire whither we were bound.

For a moment he hesitated, as if debating with himself whether he should satisfy my curiosity; but apparently concluding it could do not harm, his face relaxed into a grim smile.

"To France," he replied briefly.

"France?" I cried, unable under the sudden surprise to conceal the dismay his words caused me.

"Aye," he answered sourly, enjoying my too evident confusion. "The prospect does not please you? Well, I think that the galleys will more than counterbalance this." And he lightly touched his neck.

I would have questioned him still further but that the captain and the mate arrived at this moment upon the jetty just as a boat put off from the vessel's side and made rapidly for the spot where we were standing. But at sight of the boat, or rather I supposed, finding no boat ready waiting for us, the captain, who I saw at a glance was decidedly the worse for liquor, broke out into a string of horrid curses, which ceased only for lack of breath. With face inflamed and gait unsteady he ad-

vanced to the end of the jetty and awaited its nearer approach.

"You rogues!" he roared, as the object of his rage came alongside and the two evil-looking faces of the seamen who manned it were raised to his. "You scum! You devil-spawn! You must return to the ship without orders, must ye! And keep your betters waiting, must ye!—Burn my body! but I'll teach ye discipline when I get aboard!"

Then in a fresh access of drunken fury he turned suddenly upon me, and drawing a pistol from his belt waved it towards the waiting boat below. "Get in, you dog!" he shouted brutally. I glanced at the faces of the men around me. In no one of them did I see aught but satisfaction at my departure. So, with the prospect of escape at present receding, I shrugged my shoulders lightly, and disdaining further speech of them, I seated myself in the bow of the boat.

Scarcely had I ensconced myself ere the captain and the mate took their places in the stern, the captain still with the pistol upon his knees.

"Shove off and be damned to ye!" he roared. "And put your backs to it if you would not wish a bullet in ye!"

Obedient to his command, the men bent to their oars in sullen silence—a silence all too plainly born of fear—and we headed for the distant vessel—and a prison.

As the distance between the boat and the shore behind us gradually increased I took my last look of Cleeve. The evening was fast drawing on and already the cloud

shadows lay in darkened patches upon the green slopes of Cleevesborough, though all around us the sea shimmered golden in the glory of the sinking sun. Behind us, the little group of figures upon the jetty still lingered, staring after us—the sorrel in their midst. And so still was the evening air that even at that distance their voices came plainly to my ears across the widening water. Away to the right, above the dark woods that crowned the rugged cliffs, I caught sight of the tall chimneys of the manor that had proved so sorry a grave to my ambitions. Bitter were my thoughts as I gazed upon it. A week ago had seen me in the plenitude of power—master of the manor and of all beneath its roof. Now I sat in the gathering night shadows—a helpless, dishonoured prisoner, every stroke of the oars speeding me nearer to France and to the galleys. And the cause of it all—a woman!

All this time the captain in the stern had not been silent—now cursing at the seamen for their tardiness, anon breaking out into snatches of the song I had before heard:

> "And the black eyed maids of Spain, my lads!
> Oho! for the maids of Spain!

Presently I turned my attention to the vessel we were rapidly approaching. Certainly the appearance of the captain and the crew were not prepossessing, and confirmed me in the opinion that she was a privateer,—most likely hailing from Bristol—one of those free lances of the ocean fitted out by wealthy Jacobites to assist the cause of James; but which—such was the unsettled

state of the times—preyed upon all merchant shipping alike with strict impartiality.

The ship proved to be a larger craft upon nearer approach than I had first imagined. She lay motionless upon the water, stern on towards us, and her tapering spars and tracery of ropes stood darkly out against the evening sky. As we swept round to larboard, above the cabin window in her stern I saw her name, *The Scourge*. At the same time I caught sight of a score or more of villainous faces gazing at us from above the bulwarks of her low, black hull, from which, here and there, the frowning muzzles of her guns protruded. But small time had I for speculation upon her character, for no sooner were we alongside—and it was not without considerable difficulty that I gained the deck—than the captain turned fiercely upon the first of the two sailors who had followed us aboard.

"That for disobeying orders, you dog!" he cried, snatching a pistol from his belt and striking the fellow so shrewd a blow with the heavy butt that the rogue fell to the deck half stunned.

"Up with ye!" he added, bestowing a brutal kick upon the man's prostrate body. "No skulking here while Barclay's in command. Though, curse me! a more humane man than I never left Bristol port!"

More I was not permitted to see or hear, for at a word from the mate, a couple of the ruffians seized me, and forcing me down a narrow companion ladder aft, flung open a door at its foot and thrust me inside with unnecessary violence; and I heard the shooting of the

heavy bolts behind them. At first, I could distinguish nothing of my surroundings, but after a few moments, when my eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom, I made out that I was in a small cabin some seven feet square, destitute of all furniture, but with a narrow wooden locker at one end. Such light and air as there was—if light it could be called, which was at best but semi-darkness—came from a narrow slit, six inches high—not more, above the door. As for the heat of the place, 'twas stifling, for be it remembered it was now the very height of summer, and the little air there was below deck stole through the open companion way down which we had come. I raised my hand above me and found that I could touch with ease the massive timbers overhead. Being a tall man, as I have previously stated, I also found that with comparatively little difficulty I could raise my face to the level of the slit above the door. But there was little to reward my curiosity. I could see, indeed, the companion ladder without and a narrow passage to my left running into the gloom, which I conjectured to lead to the cabins astern, but that was all.

I next turned my attention to the door itself. It was of stout timber, far too strong to be broken open by anything short of an axe and fastened, moreover, by the bolts that I had heard drawn. Presently, therefore, I desisted from my inspection, and seating myself upon the locker, I gave myself up to my reflections. The light grew feebler and feebler in the cabin, until at length it died out altogether, and I was left in the darkness to

speculate upon the strange adversities of fortune. As for the steward's threat of the galleys, I swore desperately to myself that such a fate should not be mine, though as yet I could see no glimmer of light as to how I was to accomplish my escape. One thing I had in my favour. The vessel was yet at anchor and remembering the fact of the stillness of the evening air, I thought it unlikely that a breeze would spring up for many hours, so that there was time before me wherein to formulate a plan.

It was not until some two hours later that I saw a light glimmer upon the ceiling of the cabin and heard a heavy step descending the ladder. A moment later the bolts were withdrawn and the mate himself appeared in the doorway. In one hand he carried a lantern, which he held up the better to view me. He was followed by a boy bearing a coarse brown loaf and a pitcher of water. These the latter set upon the boards and withdrew. Yet the mate lingered for a moment, making pretence of waiting to see if I should speak.

"There is your supper," he said at length, finding that I kept silent.

" 'Tis coarse enough fare," I said abruptly, "and quite in keeping with your lodging."

"Yet be content," he answered, "'tis better than that of your men."

"Ah, they are aboard, then?" I said quickly; for up till now I had been so taken up with considering my own position that I had scarcely given a thought to them.

In irons," he answered, grinning. "And you, too, had we another set aboard."

"Bah!" I replied nonchalantly, concealing the trepidation his words caused me. "There are worse things, my friend, and it is not far to France."

"Ho, ho, ho!" he chuckled. "To France—no! It is not far to France, as you say."

Something in the man's words—in his face—caused me a vague uneasiness.

"Hark you, master mate," I said sharply. "I am your prisoner; why not be frank with me?—You have been paid to carry us to France, is it not so?"

"What, then?" he replied slowly. "A poor sailorman must live. There's a market for such stout knaves as you any day—in Algiers!"

And without further word he closed and bolted the door behind him, and I heard his heavy footsteps ascend the ladder, and left me in the darkness. But if I had been anxious to escape before, his last words made me doubly so. All too clearly I understood his meaning. The villains had not scrupled to accept the money paid by my lady or her Jacobite friends for our removal, but were now meditating selling us into a slavery a hundred times worse than death itself, thus making for themselves a double profit. For how long I sat there in the darkness, revolving this and all that had led up to it I do not know. At length, worn out by the excitement and events of the day through which I had passed, I stretched myself upon the hard boards, and with my coat for a pillow fell into a heavy slumber.

For many hours I must have slept the sleep of exhaustion, for the light was glimmering faintly upon the beams overhead when I awoke to a full consciousness of my surroundings. Also I discovered at once that we were at sea, for the vessel was rolling heavily. Overhead I could hear the trampling of feet and the captain's voice roaring out hoarse commands. But no one came near me, and for hours I waited in solitude revolving a scheme in my brain which every moment took shape more clearly. True it was a chance only, and a forlorn one, yet I could see no other way, and desperate men do not stick at trifles.

The idea then came to me fully at noon, when again the door was unbolted to admit the boy and the tall mate with a repetition of the coarse fare of the preceding night. But it was necessary for the execution of my plan that I should wait for the friendly covering of darkness, so I huddled myself upon the locker and feigned to be overcome by the rolling of the ship. The mate looked at me carelessly.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he cried with a grin. "Hast lost thy sea legs, man? Why, my bully, 'tis a capful of wind this—scarce fit to call a breeze."

To this I replied with a groan by way of answer, sinking my head more forward that he might not see my face; and with a few ribald jests at my expense he presently left me in solitude.

When the door had again closed I fell to upon the food that they had brought me. Coarse though it was, I had need of all my strength for the task before me. For

as it was, in the first place, essential for me to escape from the cabin, I had resolved to attempt a sudden rush when next they should bring me my supper, trusting to luck to find some means of leaving the vessel in the darkness and confusion. 'Twas a madman's scheme at best, but I dared delay no longer, for every hour carried me farther from the shores of England. Weapon I had none, but I had caught a glimpse of a long knife in the mate's belt, and could I but get possession of this, I vowed I would not be retaken without a struggle. Also I was handicapped heavily by the wound in my breast, that had stiffened the muscles of my shoulder, leaving me with but the partial use of my left arm. And, again, there was the boy to be reckoned with. But anything was better than to tamely submit to be sold into slavery, and hope of liberty is a great factor in renewing strength and courage.

Moreover, I reflected, if what my lady had said was true, the safety of England might lie in my hands.

How long the hours seemed to me until the light began to fade in the cabin can well be imagined; but gradually it grew less and less, and was I deceived, or was it really a thin mist that came floating down the hatchway and penetrated to my prison cell? My heart gave a great leap—'twas sure a heaven sent boon to cloak my escape. And ere the light had quite faded a new inspiration came to me. I was still wearing my heavy military boots that reached above my knee, although my spurs had been removed, belike by one of the servants at the manor. I now drew these off that I might be the lighter upon my

feet and also the more silent, and the thought came to me that one of them would form no bad missile with which to preface my attack. Nay, I trusted that the first surprise would be so great that I should secure the knife with but little difficulty and then—well, liberty is dear to the heart of every man. So I waited alone in the darkness with every nerve strung for the coming encounter, listening to the creaking of the ship's timbers and the faint shouts of command from the deck overhead. And at last there came a gleam of light above the doorway, and I heard the mate's step upon the ladder. Once he slipped ere he reached the bottom and I heard him curse loudly.

I rose at that, and with the boot in my hand awaited the opening of the door. But Fortune, that had of late played me so many scurvy tricks, was surely anxious to make amends to me that night, for upon the bolts being withdrawn, the door swung slowly open and disclosed the figure of the mate only. He had set the lantern upon the floor at his feet and in his left hand carried my coarse night fare. Without troubling to raise the light so as to satisfy himself as to my condition, he took two steps into the cabin and stooped to place the food upon the floor. But that was his undoing; for hastily changing my original intention, as the rogue bent down I swung the boot aloft, and with all the strength of arm and body brought down the heavy heel upon his head. Without cry or groan he flung his arms wide and fell an inert heap at my feet. In a moment I had thrown myself upon him—my hands upon his throat. But there was little

need for me to exert any pressure there, the fellow lay as motionless as a log. And when, a moment later, I released my grip and slightly raised his head, it fell again with a dull thud upon the boards. Not till then did I rise to my feet, my first care being to secure the lantern, and with this in my hand I re-entered the cabin and carefully closed the door behind me. Then I again bent over my prisoner. A very brief examination sufficed to assure me that the fellow was but stunned; and securing his knife, I bound his arms firmly behind his back with his own belt; and with a strip torn from the sleeve of his shirt and his red cap I made an effectual gag. This done, I propped him against the locker. Then blowing out the lantern, I crept from the cabin. Once outside in the passage, I shot the heavy bolts behind me and stood still for a moment listening.

Not a sound came to show that the mate's fall had been heard from the deck, though I could hear voices raised as though in altercation, and I knew that it would not be long before his absence was discovered. 'Twas almost dark where I stood, at the foot of the ladder, clutching the knife in my hand, every nerve in my body braced to meet whatever should befall. Overhead, a lighter patch in the gloom indicated the hatchway. As my eyes grew more accustomed to my surroundings, I made out that the only other exit was by way of the narrow passage on my left, that led, I felt assured, to the cabin astern. Yet I was reluctant to abandon my men without making some effort to liberate them, even though, from what the mate had said, I knew them to be in irons some-

where in the forepart of the ship. I should, indeed, have ventured upon some desperate scheme for their release—which would assuredly have led to my own undoing—nay, I had already ascended the ladder, and my head was all but on a level with the deck—enough so, indeed, to show me that a thin damp mist wrapped the ship in its embrace, so that of the masts and spars above little was discernible—when on a sudden from the deck above came the hoarse voice of Captain Barclay.

"Forward there!" he roared. "Where is the mate? Send him aft, one o' ye!"

'Twas a question of minutes only ere his plight was discovered. I turned on the instant, and darting down the ladder, sped swiftly along the narrow passage opposite, to where a faint light shone from beneath a door at the farther end. I did not stop to consider what might lie behind it, but taking a firmer grip of the knife, I flung open the door. A single glance showed me the cabin was empty. Swiftly I closed the door and shot the heavy bolt that fastened it, then glanced quickly around me.

A single oil lamp swung from a beam in the centre, faintly illuminating the interior. It shone upon the small square table immediately below it, littered with the remains of a meal, and upon a few articles of clothing, tossed carelessly upon the sleeping bunk, as well as upon a few old-fashioned pistols and hangers. But 'twas to the window that I turned my attention, flinging it open and gazing out into the night. One quick glance I gave, then an exclamation of thankfulness rose to my lips. It

"A very brief examination sufficed to assure me that the fellow was but stunned"

was, indeed, the stern cabin of the ship, and the light shone out upon a white wall of vapour; for the sea fog was thickening fast. But it was not that only that had fired me with hope; 'twas the sight of a rope cleaving the mist; and peering down, I made out the dim outline of a boat towing astern.

On a sudden, as I leaned far out of the window and grasped the rope with both hands, the deep voice of the man at the helm above me broke out into the song I knew so well:

> "With the still lagoons and the bright doubloons—
> And the black-eyed maids of Spain, my lads!
> Oho! for the maids of Spain!"

Then after a pause: "Curse this mist!" I heard him mutter. And precisely at this moment came a thundering knock upon the cabin door behind me and a gruff voice calling upon the mate to open.

'Twas no time to hesitate; at the risk of being seen by the helmsman above me—at the risk of my wound re-opening—I launched myself out upon my frail support and let myself down into the darkness.

It seemed an eternity ere my feet touched the bow of the boat below, but once I had clambered aboard a few strokes of my knife served to sever the rope, and a moment later the light in the cabin of the *Scourge* disappeared into the fog, leaving me alone upon the waste of waters. Not till then did I seize the oars, and pulling the boat's head round commence to row gently in the opposite direction to that which the vessel had taken.

Blacker and blacker closed the night around me, until I could scarcely see the full length of the boat. Presently the mist changed into rain, that grew ever in volume until I was soon drenched to the skin. In this condition, worn out and shivering in my wet clothes, I continued for many hours, until gradually a numbness began to steal over me. In vain I struggled against it. Slowly it grew upon me despite my efforts, until at length, careless of what fate might befall me, I stretched myself in the bottom of the boat and lapsed into unconsciousness.

* * * * *

"Boat ahoy!"

The cry came pealing across the water and was still ringing in my ears when my scattered senses returned to me. I raised my head above the thwart and gazed about me, as yet but half awakened. Darkness had given place to a grey and misty dawn and the rain had ceased to fall. But almost immediately my eyes fell upon that which effectually aroused me.

At a short distance away a small brig lay to upon the water, a dozen curious faces looking down upon me from the low bulwarks. Upon the raised poop astern two men were standing, gazing earnestly in my direction. One was short and thick set, with sailor written plainly upon his weather-beaten countenance. The other was to all appearance a gentleman, though his tall figure was concealed by a long riding coat; and I could see little of his face beneath his richly laced hat. 'Twas the shorter of the two who had hailed me.

"Ahoy!" he cried again in stentorian tones. "Can ye row aboard?"

At that I shouted back an assent; though exhaustion had so wrought upon me that my voice was strangely weak; and again betaking myself to the oars, I gained at length the vessel's side, where a dozen friendly hands assisted me aboard. The tall gentleman had disappeared from the poop, but his companion, whom I took to be the master of the ship, came forward to receive me. He quickly cut short my few stammered expressions of gratitude. "Presently, presently!" he said, eyeing me closely. "Why, y'are wet to the skin, man, and fit subject for an ague. Here," he cried, beckoning to two of the seamen standing near, "take him below and rig him out amongst ye! No, no," he continued not unkindly, seeing that I was about to speak, "y'are on my ship, man, and needs must obey orders! Afterwards you may tell your tale." And he turned upon his heel.

I said no more, but followed the seamen down into the forecastle, where, after receiving a somewhat motley change of garments, together with a stiff pannikin of cognac, I felt little the worse for my night's adventure. From the seamen themselves I could gain but little information, save that the brig was the *Pride of Devon*, three days out from Kinsale, and bound for Southampton, and that she had been considerably delayed by the thick fog prevailing the previous day. Upon all other subjects they were strangely reticent, so that I presently gave up questioning them and signified my readiness to accompany them on deck.

On arriving there I saw the figure of the master awaiting me at the foot of the poop ladder; but to my astonishment, upon my approaching he laid a finger upon his lips, and advancing to the door of a cabin, which I had not noticed beneath the poop, he threw it open and signed to me to enter.

I did so, wondering.

'Twas a small room, yet somewhat larger than the size of the brig itself promised. In the centre was a table, upon which a repast was already spread; and at this table was seated the gentleman I had previously seen.

He rose at my entrance and made me a courtly bow; then for a moment we gazed at each other in silence. He was, I think, the handsomest man I have ever seen—with regular features and fair moustache matching in colour with his court peruke. He had laid aside his hat, though I noted with surprise that he still wore his plain dark riding coat tightly buttoned, concealing all of his dress beneath save a pair of spurred riding boots. Of fully my own height, he may have been somewhat older in years; but it was rather the lofty look of mingled pride and command upon his face that caught and rivetted the eye. Here was a born leader of men I told myself, one accustomed to exact obedience, and possessing a fiery and indomitable will. No poverty of dress could conceal the latent power suppressed within, or the grace of movement that spoke equally of noble birth.

"Do I address the owner of this vessel?" I said bluntly.

For a moment I thought that a faint smile flickered upon his face.

"For the present at least, sir," he answered quietly, "I think that I may safely claim that title."

"Then permit me to tender you my sincere thanks for your timely assistance, sir," I replied.

He raised his hand deprecatingly.

"Nay, 'tis unnecessary," he replied. "Important as time is to me at present, humanity would forbid me deserting a fellow-being in such distress, and," he added, with a piercing glance, "if I mistake not, a fellow-soldier."

"Of some little experience," I answered proudly.

"Why, then," he replied, smiling, "I was about to break my fast, sir, when your boat was sighted. Permit me to play the part of host, and we will fight the battles of the world together." And he waived me courteously to a seat.

I bowed in acceptance, and sat down to the table with mingled feelings, foremost among which was one of puzzled bewilderment. For minute by minute it was borne in on me that I had met this gentleman before, though I could not place him in my memory. Yet something in his features, in his grace of manner, seemed strangely familiar, reminding me of some one I had lately met. But of whom? And where?

CHAPTER XIII

OF THE LONELY HUT ON THE SHORE

THAT I should do full justice to the ample meal before me after my scanty fare of the past two days was not to be wondered at. Meantime, my host chatted pleasantly upon general subjects, more especially upon the wars in Flanders, in which I gathered he had studied the art of war under the great Turenne. Here was a subject upon which, as soldiers, we could both grow enthusiastic; and we exchanged mutual reminiscences of that great man—conceded to be the most celebrated general of his age. At length, when the wine was put before us, I said slowly:

"Doubtless you are curious to learn, sir, how I came to be in the position from which you rescued me?"

"As to that," he replied, "seeing that I cannot at present return the like confidence as regards myself, I can respect your reticence. Enough that we are followers of the same profession. War is a common mistress for uniting her devotees all the world over."

Yet glancing across at him, I felt that he deserved some further explanation, though I resolved not to reveal the whole truth. Little did I guess that had I indeed done so, the whole future course of my life would have been changed. Little did I dream what strange vagary Fate was playing me there in that little cabin with the

grey light of morning falling upon the handsome face of the man before me!

"Nay," I said carelessly, "'tis a common story enough. I escaped yesterday from a rascally privateer, upon which I had been entrapped."

"They are the curse of the seas!" he said impetuously. "'Tis a sign of the times and a scandal to our navy that such hornets are permitted to sail with impunity. Even upon our own Devon coast I have known men to have been kidnapped for the plantations."

He stopped abruptly, as if he had said too much, and I saw a shade of annoyance for a moment upon his face. But on my own part, though I pretended to see nothing, I was quick to notice his confusion; and toying with my glass, I replied:

"I learn, sir, from the seamen that this vessel is bound for Southampton; had it been at all possible, I would fain have landed in Devonshire."

"Nothing is easier," he responded. "My own destination is Teignmouth; if this will suit your convenience, you are welcome to accompany me ashore."

"Sir," I made answer, "you are a very courteous gentleman, and right gladly do I accept your offer."

He bent his head in acknowledgment.

"Then that is settled," he replied gaily, with a wave of the hand, as if dismissing the subject. "For the rest, I fear I do but play the host indifferently. Your glass is empty, permit me to replenish it. And now, sir, what think you of Luxembourg's qualities as a general?"

Thereupon we plunged once more into a discussion of

the campaigns in Flanders, upon which subject I found my companion to have an intimate knowledge; so that it was not until nearly an hour later that we ascended to the deck. We there found a distinct change for the better in the appearance of the weather. A fitful gleam of sunshine stole occasionally through the heavy grey clouds and the mist was gradually clearing from the surface of the water. Away to the north, a dark streak of land was faintly discernible, which the master speedily informed us was the distant coast of Devon. But the wind had fallen considerably and the little vessel forged but slowly through the water. One thing I could not help but notice—the unusual deference paid by the master to my companion; confirming me in my opinion as to his rank and quality. All morning, indeed, we sailed slowly along the coast, seeing no other vessel, for at this time the fear of the French kept our merchantmen to the harbours, save when a goodly number could be conveyed by a fleet of men-of-war. And with every hour I could see that my companion's impatience to reach our destination visibly increased. Though still preserving his courteous demeanour towards me, a dozen times, at least, I heard him demand of the master whether sail could not be increased. But the latter only shook his head, and noon found us some four miles south of Prawle Point. It was shortly afterwards that we descended to the cabin to dine; but our meal was not concluded ere we were again summoned to the deck by the report of a suspicious sail. My companion rose at once, and together we ascended to the poop, where we found the master

anxiously scanning a sail that showed plainly through the mist some ten miles to the southward. Nor had we ourselves escaped observation, for even as we stood watching, the vessel's course was changed and she bore down upon us.

My companion turned to the master with a mute inquiry in his eyes.

The latter shook his head with a lugubrious air. "'Tis not, yon vessel will prove to be some rascally French picaroon. Were there more wind I would not fear the result; but I misdoubt gentlemen, whether we shall see Teignmouth this trip."

The gentleman at my side uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"But our bargain, captain?" he cried quickly. "You have been paid to carry me to Teignmouth, and a bargain is a bargain."

"Aye," the other answered doggedly; "and a life is a life; and what think ye would ours be worth should yonder rascals run us aboard? No, no, Exmouth is our only refuge, for there is a king's ship in the harbour—and Lord send that we see it safely!"

In vain my companion remonstrated with him, the fellow was as stubborn as a rock. And in the light of recent events I could not but admit the justice of his decision. One concession only would he agree to make—to run in shore as close as possible and to provide us with a boat, by which my companion and I might leave the ship if we so desired.

Slowly the afternoon wore away as the chase con-

tinued. With every hour the sun shone out more radiantly, its level beams falling full upon the white canvas of our pursuing foe; and upon an ominous row of guns that boded ill for the brig if it were overtaken. From time to time my companion fell to thoughtfully pacing the deck, at others he would take the master aside, as if to learn his opinion as to our chances of escape. As for me, I had no desire to intrude upon his privacy or to seem curious as to the reason for his evident anxiety. I withdrew, therefore, to the stern, and leaning upon the low bulwarks, fell into conversation with the man at the helm.

He was a rough, weather-beaten old seadog and was willing enough to respond to my advances and to impart me information.

"Aye, aye," he said in reply to a question I put him. "She will catch us sure enough ere we reach Exmouth, if so be as the king's ship hear not the sound of our guns."

He glanced as he spoke with sailorly pride at a few antiquated pieces of brass cannon that had to me the appearance of the veriest toys. "Take my advice, master," he added in a lower tone, so that no one but myself might hear, "leave the ship if ye have the chance; 'tis a deal the safer."

A moment later his mahogany face resumed its ordinary blank expression, as a quick step sounded behind me, and turning swiftly, I found my host at my elbow.

"The time has come, sir," he said quietly, "to determine our future course of action. For my own part, I

have decided to leave the vessel, but I would not unduly influence your own decision. Should you consider yourself safer on board, you are at full liberty to remain."

I flung a quick glance around me. Dusk had fallen, but some two miles away loomed the rugged cliffs of Torbay. Astern the pursuing vessel had crept up to within three miles of us. My mind was speedily made up.

"On the contrary," I made answer, "I shall be pleased to accompany you; though I fear, sir, that you will find me more of an encumbrance in the boat than otherwise." And I briefly informed him of my wound. But he waived aside all my objections, and after a few moments' earnest conversation with the master he retraced his steps to my side.

"In five minutes' time, sir, a boat will be provided for our departure. If you have any preparations to make, I pray you then to be in readiness."

He bowed as he spoke and descended the ladder to the little cabin to collect I supposed his own belongings; as for me, I went below to the forecastle and donned once more the clothes I had worn when I first came on board. This done, I made my way on deck. Swift as I had been in the process, I found my companion already awaiting me with visible impatience upon his countenance. To my muttered apology he took no heed, but stepped to where a boat was already lowered alongside.

"At your convenience," he said, with a waive of his hand towards the stern.

"But," I replied hesitatingly, "there is but room for two. You do not mean——"

He shrugged his shoulders negligently.

"Our friend here is already shorthanded, therefore for the nonce I must be my own oarsman. Have no fear, however, on that account," he added with a smile, as I broke out into a few words of remonstrance. "'Tis not the first time I have handled an oar, though I must confess to being of late years sadly out of practice."

He seated himself as he spoke, and without further delay I took the place assigned to me, and with a few words of kindly leave-taking and advice from the rough seamen above us—which my companion courteously acknowledged by raising his laced hat—the rope was cast off and the little vessel forged rapidly ahead.

To me there was something strange and incongruous in the sight of this gentleman with his aristocratic face and bearing and his shapely white hands—upon one of which I descried a magnificent ruby—yet plying the oars with the skill of one accustomed to such exercise. For the rest, we had covered but half the distance when the pursuing vessel passed us little more than a mile astern; but to our satisfaction she did not alter her course, but held on in pursuit of the brig. It was growing rapidly dark when we approached the cliffs, and passed slowly along them, seeking some break in their granite barrier where we might safely land. The unusual exertion I could see was telling upon my companion, though he resolutely refused to allow me to change places with him, and presently we came upon such a place as we sought. Two tongues of rock jutting crescent-shape from the

base of the cliff left a clear space between them some ten feet wide, through which the tide poured with the fury of a millrace. Inside this rocky opening it widened into a little bay, the whole forming a natural harbour, ending in a white pebbly beach. So much we could see, but no more; and without hesitation my companion pulled for the narrow entrance on the crest of a huge roller. We had reached it, were all but through, I had opened my lips to congratulate him upon his skill when he uttered a shout of warning. Whether we had miscalculated the width of the opening in the deeper shadows cast by the cliff, or whether my companion's oar struck against a sunken rock I do not know, but on a sudden the boat capsized, and I found myself struggling in the water. Of the next few moments I have but a confused recollection, for I am no swimmer. I know that the wave swept me forward, that I went under, rose to the surface sank again, and the next moment my feet touched the bottom, and I found myself gasping waist deep in the water. I dashed the water from my eyes and made for the beach. A little to my right I saw the dark outline of the boat floating bottom upwards. At the same moment a heavy object struck against my knees, all but sweeping me from my feet, and glancing downwards, I saw the white face of my companion, white, but with a crimson splash upon his forehead. I caught his arm and with set teeth braced myself to meet the back wash. When this had passed, I raised my companion's inert form in my arms and staggered up the beach beyond reach of the water. Then I laid my bur-

den down and stooped to examine his injuries. He was quite insensible and was bleeding profusely from a long, ragged cut upon the temple, inflicted, doubtless, by a sunken rock or by the boat itself when it capsized. Nor for all my efforts could I restore him to consciousness. Once, indeed, as I bound up the cut with the scarf taken from his neck, he groaned slightly, and bending my head closer—for the darkness had deepened around us—I fancied that I saw his eyelids quiver. But he speedily lapsed once more into total unconsciousness, so that I began to fear that his injuries might be severer than I had at first imagined. 'Twas essential, above all things, that I should procure assistance, and that speedily, ere it became quite dark. Accordingly I rose to my feet and took a rapid survey of my surroundings. On either side of me towered the rugged cliffs, but in front the beach gave way to a narrow valley—one of those bosky coombes so common to the coast of Devon. I started to ascend it, therefore, and scarcely had I advanced a quarter of a mile than I was overjoyed to see a light shining through the trees. Towards this I directed my steps, and presently found myself standing upon the edge of a little clearing in the centre of which stood a rude hut. By this time the moon had risen above the torrs, and in its clear light, a short distance away, I saw a white road running past the head of the coombe. From the hut itself came the sound of hammering, with now and again a snatch of song. I lost no time in approaching and knocking with my clenched fist upon the door. At the sound both song and hammering died away, and

a moment later the door was opened and disclosed the figure of the singer.

He was a little old man, dressed in rough fisherman's attire and with the most prominent eyes I had ever seen. Indeed, his whole appearance gave me the impression that he was not overburdened with wits. The interior of the hut was of the poorest description. On the one side I caught sight of a half-finished boat, upon which the fellow had been engaged when I had disturbed him. Upon the other was a couch of dried fern leaves. This, together with a rough table and stool and a litter of nets, seemed to sum up the total of his property. Yet when I had given him a hurried explanation, he readily consented to return with me for my companion, and a minute later we were striding down the coombe side by side. I gathered on the way that we had landed upon the northern coast of Torbay, and that Cleeve itself lay little more than two miles distant. I learned also that two days before a French fleet of six sail of the line had put into the bay, but that upon the approach of a British squadron they had sailed hurriedly for the coast of France, so that all danger of invasion was at present at an end.

"Ah," thought I, "so, my lady, your pretty scheme has failed, and the wheel of fortune turns once more in my favour!" We found my companion still lying in the same position in which I had left him, and raising him in our arms, bore him with difficulty—for he was no light weight and the trees were thick—back to the hut. But it was upon reaching this latter, and depositing our sense-

less burden upon the bed of ferns that fate culminated in the strangest trick of all. For no sooner did the old man beside me catch sight of my companion's face in the light of the rushlight fixed to the wall than he uttered a startled exclamation.

"Lord save us!" he cried. "'Tis the master himself."

"How, fellow!" I said in surprise. "You know this gentleman?"

"Aye, aye," he answered, scarce finding his tongue. "Know him? I have lived this forty years upon his land."

"Then who is he?" I cried, no suspicion of the truth dawning upon my mind. "Speak out, man?"

"You do not know?" he stammered. "You do not know the Earl of Cleeve?"

"What!"

In my surprise I gripped his arm so tightly that he cried out in sudden pain, and wrenching himself free, caught up his hammer and put the table between us. But as for me I had forgotten the fellow's very presence, and stood staring down into the white face of the man before me with but two thoughts gradually dawning upon my stunned senses; for if this man's words were true, then this—this—was the Earl of Cleeve, and my lady's brother. As all the possibilities of what this latter phrase might mean to be flashed suddenly upon my mind I could have shouted aloud in my elation. It was not that I knew this man's name to be proscribed, it was not for the sake of the reward offered by goverment for his capture, though that alone might have tempted a more

sordid man than I—no, it was the knowledge that I held his secret and his life in the hollow of my hand—that now at last I would have a full and final reckoning with my lady. At last! Oh, I would wring that proud heart! I would humble that haughty spirit to the very dust! I would crush her without pity or remorse! She should plead—kneel—nay, grovel at my feet—for the life that I would refuse!

We had parted last with but little seeming hope for me to obtain revenge; now all the cards were in my hand, and the man whom she had scorned, despised, and struck—struck!—I swore a bitter oath at the remembrance—had power to bring ruin upon her house and make her taste the bitterness of death!

As I conjured up the picture of that proud head bowed low in sorrow, I laughed aloud in my exultation. Then my eyes encountered those of the owner of the hut, who still remained in the same attitude, suspiciously regarding me, and I came back to earth with a sudden start.

"Pshaw!" I said contemptuously. "I will do you no hurt, man! See, I am in a merry mood!—a right merry mood!" And again I laughed exultantly.

"Aye," he muttered, crossing himself, "but 'tis merriment that is not good to hear."

I paid no further attention to him, but bent low over my companion's prostrate form and looked long and earnestly in his face. Now I understood at a glance the likeness to some one that at our first meeting had so puzzled me; now on a sudden I remembered of whom the voice and manners had reminded me. Surely I had been

blind not to see before the likeness to my lady. Even as I gazed at him the colour returned slightly to his cheeks, and his lips parted in a scarcely audible sigh. I sank on one knee beside him and threw open his riding coat. Had I needed corroboration of the fisherman's words, I received it then, and the mystery as to why he had retained his coat in the cabin was at once made clear. For beneath it he was clad in a suit of violet-coloured velvet and his breast glittered with the insignia of some half dozen orders, among which my eyes fell upon the blue ribbon of the Garter and the Order of St. Louis. The hilt of his sword, too, which had been concealed before by his outer coat, was thickly studded with jewels, though the blade itself was of the finest Toledo steel, as I speedily discovered when I essayed to test it. This latter weapon I did not hesitate to appropriate for my own use, and it was with a sigh of satisfaction that I fastened it to my side; for 'tis wonderful what a feeling of security may be given to a man by the possession of three feet of good honest steel.

Oh, it was all clear to me now—clear as daylight! As James's most trusted councillor, having great influence in Devonshire and the adjacent counties, he had been hurriedly dispatched by his master to create a diversion in his favour by heading a general rising of the Jacobites throughout the West. By which means James relied upon William withdrawing some of his veteran troops from Ireland to quell it. That it was a plan hurriedly formed and as hurriedly executed was plain, seeing that the earl had not had time to don any disguise ere pro-

ceeding on board. I bade my unwilling host bring water, and with this I bathed my companion's wound and again adjusted the bandage.

"He will do now," I said briefly to my host, who had drawn slowly near, watching the proceedings with marked attention. "Leave me to think, my friend!"

He drew back at that into a corner of the hut and stood furtively regarding me, whilst I seated myself upon the stool at my patient's side and rapidly reflected how best I could profit by this unexpected development. For some little time I remained buried in thought, reviewing in all its details a scheme which gradually increased in favour with me the more I conned it. With so much satisfaction did it present itself to my mind that my breath grew quicker at the thought, and I moistened my dry lips in pleasurable anticipation. Indeed, so absorbed was I in my own thoughts that it was with a start of genuine surprise I heard from without the sharp clink of a hoof striking against a stone, with the sound of a hearty oath. I sprang to my feet and laid my hand upon my sword. I had my own reasons for not desiring any company at that moment.

"The door, fool!" I cried to the old man, as there came the sound of footsteps without and the jingle of harness. "Bar the door!"

But it was too late. Even as the words left my lips, and as he moved to execute my bidding, on a sudden the door was flung open, and a harsh voice cried: "Within there! Can'st tell me how far it is to— Cassilis?" I think that an oath rose to my lips also; for there, framed

in the doorway, with his rein slung upon his arm, stood the man of all others that I least desired to see.

"De Brito!" I cried when I had recovered from my surprise. "What brings you here?"

"I might with equal justice demand the same of you," he answered. "But as I have ridden express from Dartmouth with a message for you, I may as well acquit me here of my errand."

"For me?" I cried in still more surprise.

"Aye," he replied, drawing a sealed paper from his breast; "though I little expected to find you here when I saw the light from the road yonder. Curse me, if I understand it!"

"That is my affair," I said coldly. "Give me the letter."

"Aye, but," he continued, unheeding my words, "your uniform—and— 'Sdeath! whom have we there?"

He had, for the first time apparently, observed the inanimate figure behind me. And at that moment the earl stirred slightly and groaned. I had placed myself so as to screen his face from De Brito's view and I now hastened to answer the latter with what carelessness I could assume.

"'Tis a long story," I replied, "and must wait the telling at some future opportunity. But amongst other adventures I was carried off by a privateer. This is a common sailorman, who assisted me to escape and was hurt in so doing."

"Indeed!" De Brito answered with a sneer. I could

read in his eyes that he did not believe my words. "But that I have your word for it I had not given you credit for playing the part of good Samaritan. How now! What are you staring at, old death's head?"

Following the direction of his eyes, I saw that the old man had drawn gradually nearer during this brief conversation and was now gazing from one to the other of us with a peculiar expression upon his face. Meeting my eyes, he drew back hurriedly, muttering to himself. I turned again to De Brito.

"Enough!" I said impatiently. "The man is half a fool. And now the paper!"

He had no further excuse for withholding it and gave it into my hands. Doubtless he hoped that I should move nearer to the light so that he might be enabled to indulge his curiosity. But I was too wary to be so caught, and while opening it I still preserved my position in front of my companion so that he was unable to get a sight of his face. Finding that I was not to be enticed thus, he sulkily retired a few steps, and whilst still keeping a watchful eye upon him I turned my attention to the letter in my hand. Its contents were brief and to the point.

"This is to warn you news has been received that the Earl of Cleeve hath set sail for England to effect a rising in favour of James Stuart. So much we know from one who hath betrayed him; but not his landing place. Therefore, be on your guard. Keep watch upon the house. Keep watch upon the servants. 'Tis not unlikely he will endeavour to communicate with his home. And

forget not that a thousand crowns await his apprehension." The letter was signed "Colonel Savage" and was dated July 4, 1690.

With what feelings I read these words, knowing that the object of this reward lay helpless at my feet, may well be imagined. I raised my eyes to De Brito. He was staring fixedly past me, an evil smile curling his lips.

"You say that the regiment is at Dartmouth," I said at length.

"Aye," he answered laconically. "What then?"

"This," I replied quickly, anxious only to be rid of his presence. "You wil return at once and tell Colonel Savage from me that I will obey his instructions in every respect. Aye, and if he can spare me twenty troopers, so much the better. That is all, I think." And I glanced meaningly at the door. But for the moment he made no offer to move.

"Before I go," he said slowly, "I would ask you a question."

"Well, what is it, man?" I cried impatiently.

"Do common sailors wear such rings as that?" he answered, nodding in my direction.

I will own that his words took me somewhat off my guard. I cast a quick glance behind me, and saw at once what had caught his attention. The earl had moved slightly, and one hand hung down by his side, and upon it, flashing and scintillating in the wavering light, was the magnificent ruby I had remarked when in the boat. But I was quick to regain my wits.

"Tush!" I replied with affected carelessness. "Stolen, no doubt. Did I not say it was a privateer?"

"No doubt," De Brito answered with a sneer. "And that white hand—was that stolen also?"

But my patience was fast vanishing. "Hark you!" I said sternly, fingering my sword hilt. "If you are wise you will not seek to meddle with my affairs. You have received your orders. Go!"

For a moment he stood facing me, a dark scowl upon his face. But he knew that I was the better swordsman and he had no stomach for a fight. Stifling an oath, he turned upon his heel and left the hut. I followed him through the door and watched him mount. When he had gathered up the reins preparatory to departing, he turned in his saddle and addressed me.

"Good-night to you, Captain Cassilis," he cried mockingly. "I think I promised you once not to forget you. Well, 'tis a pleasant night for a ride, and Meriden lies but a mile or so out of my way!" Then in a sudden outburst of rage he shook his fist at me with a furious oath. The next moment he had set spurs to his horse, and I heard the beat of his hoofs die away upon the night.

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE HOME COMING OF HIS GRACE OF CLEEVE

For some moments I remained in the same attitude, staring fixedly in the direction in which he had disappeared, and pondering upon his words; then I retraced my steps to the hut. At the doorway I paused. The old man had left his position in my absence and was now kneeling by the earl's side, apparently muttering something in his ear. Even as I gazed he put his two hands upon his breast and lightly shook him.

Then I entered. "What is it? What are you doing there?" I cried.

At the sound of my voice he turned his head towards me but he did not rise. "Aye, but 'tis a sad sight this," he replied quaveringly. "There will be sorrow at the manor when this is known."

"You say true, old man," I answered grimly. "There *will* be sorrow there—sorrow indeed!"

I crossed over to his side and stood staring for a moment at my late companion. The colour had in some measure returned to his face and he lay breathing heavily. I stooped and gently disengaged the ruby from his finger, to slip it upon my own. Then I turned to leave the hut. I had all but reached the door when the old man's voice arrested me. He had risen to his feet, and

I noticed a subdued excitement in his voice and manner; but of this I thought nothing at the time.

"You are going out?" he said slowly.

"Aye," I answered. "Is there anything strange in that? I will myself bear tidings of the earl's misfortune to the manor. You say that yonder road will take me to the village?"

"It runs direct," he replied eagerly. "You cannot miss the way, and 'tis scarcely two miles distant."

"Why, then," I answered, "I shall start at once. In the meantime you will watch over our friend there. He will sleep belike for many hours, and see that you open not the door till my return. You understand?"

He nodded in assent, and without further word I went out closing the door behind me.

Once upon the road I looked long and searchingly to the south. De Brito had long since disappeared, and no figure of man or beast broke the barren surface of the low hills. I turned my face resolutely northwards and set out at a brisk pace for my destination, picturing to myself the meeting with my lady and all that I should say. I must have been walking for the half of an hour ere I caught sight of the head of Cleevesborough, beyond which lay the village. Involuntarily I quickened my steps at sight of it, and when some time later I had skirted round its base, I found myself within a quarter of a mile of the church. It behooved me then to proceed with more caution, and accordingly I left the road and, forcing my way through the low hedge that bordered it, I made my way slowly along in its shadow.

When I had advanced thus to within a hundred yards of the nearest house, which happened indeed to be the inn, I paused to consider what course I should next take. There were lights burning in the tavern, and the dark figures of men showed through the open windows. For the rest, the village was quiet enough, and even as I stood there hesitating the clock upon the church struck ten. I had come to the decision of making a detour round the village, and was about to put this plan into execution, when a distant sound upon the road behind me brought me to a sudden halt. Far away at present, but growing momentarily nearer, came the thud of a horse's hoofs. Crouching lower in the shadow of the hedge, I awaited the appearance of the rider, a sudden suspicion crossing my mind that it was De Brito following me, though with what purpose I could not well divine. Two hundred yards away the road took a sudden bend, and it was not until the rider had passed this point that I was enabled to get a clear view of him in the moonlight. A single glance showed me that it was not De Brito, but one who rode upon an errand of life and death. The horse swayed ominously from side to side; the rider reeled in his saddle. At a nearer approach I could see his face, white and ghastly with mingled dust and weariness. And then, when within twenty yards of the spot where I lay concealed, on a sudden horse and rider came crashing to the ground, a widening pool of blood spreading from the former's mouth and nostrils telling its own tale. The horse had been ridden literally to the death. Yet the man stayed but to cast one glance at her and then stag-

gered rather than walked in the direction of the village.

'Twas then that, rising to my feet, I kept pace with him upon the opposite side of the hedge, for I was determined to ascertain the nature of his business. When he entered the courtyard of the inn I was, all unperceived by him, close enough to hear what followed, though it would have taken a sharp pair of eyes to have detected me in the deep shadow cast by the building. The man made straight for the open door before him, at the same time shouting hoarsely:

"Ho there, landlord! a cup of brandy and a horse, in the King's name!"

His words drew a dozen heads to the windows and a moment later the landlord himself appeared in the doorway. Over his shoulder I caught a glimpse of my old acquaintance the steward.

"Who calls so late? What do you wish, friend?" said the landlord.

"Food, drink, and a horse, in the King's name; for I have ridden my own to the death, and must be in Exeter ere dawn," the other answered.

"What!" cried the host. "You carry news belike?"

"News?" replied the other in a firmer tone. "Aye—news from Ireland. Great news!—glorious news!"

Then raising his voice so that all might hear, he continued: "Three days ago a great battle was fought upon the banks of the Boyne, in which James's army was totally defeated. By this time William is in Dublin."

For a moment there was a silence of sheer dismay following his words.

"And King James?" faltered the steward at length.

"The *late* king thou meanest, friend," said the other sternly.

"James Stuart fled from the field and, upbraiding those around him, embarked at Kinsdale and escaped to France, leaving those who were worthy of a better leader to make their own submission. All fear of him is at an end! God save King William!"

And faintly from the group behind came in echo, "God save King William!"

I waited to hear no more. Pressing my hat low upon my brow, I left the shadow of the wall in which I had been standing and ran swiftly down the village street. No one was abroad to question me; scarcely a light showed in any of the houses on either side; and quickly as I knew the news that I had heard would spread, for the present at least I had the start of them.

Now to put my scheme of revenge into execution—to obtain an interview with my lady.

At the end of the street I turned aside and plunged into the narrow path leading through the woods. It was darker here beneath the trees, though the moonlight filtered through the leaves and lay in silvery patches at my feet. But with my heart growing hotter with revenge, the nearer that I drew to its consummation, I pushed on, reckless of the briars that clutched at me, as if they would have impeded my progress, and cursing at every spreading root that tripped me up, and at the sudden turnings of the path that, as often as not, precipitated me into the bushes that skirted it on either side.

Upon arriving at the end of the wood I paused for a moment beneath the shadow of the trees. There were lights in the lower windows of the manor. Evidently the household had not yet retired for the night. I loosened my sword in its sheath and made my way slowly along the terrace, as once before I had done upon that memorable night when I had surprised my lady and her Jacobite friends—to the latter's disadvantage. The windows of the dining hall were open, and arriving safely at the nearest one, I cautiously peered into the room. In the silence of the night I could hear the loud beating of my own heart; for my lady herself was within a few feet of me! She was seated at the spinet, and was, as far as I could see, alone. Her back was towards me, and as yet she was all unconscious of my presence. Even as I stood watching her, she swept her fingers over the keys and broke out into a low, dreamy love-song, the passionate cadence of which held me spellbound—forgetful of the errand that had brought me there. Nay more, forgetful even of the insults I had suffered at this woman's hands; but with vague regrets rising within me, old memories awaking to which my heart had long been a stranger.

The song ceased, the last sad echoes floated out to me and died away upon the night, and my lady leaned her head upon her hand and remained lost in reverie.

Bah! Was this Captain Cassilis, whose sword was known and feared throughout the Lowlands, or was it some love-sick stripling enraptured at the sound of his mistress's voice? I passed my hand across my eyes, for

a sudden dimness had clouded their vision. Then I drew a long breath and stepped into the room.

"Madam!" I said in a low voice. She did not turn her head.

"I wish for nothing," she answered absently.

I saw that she took me for one of her servants and with a grim smile I advanced a few steps towards her. "Yet I think, madam," I replied, "that it would be as well to give me your attention."

She turned then indeed, and at sight of me she rose to her feet with a cry of surprise.

"You?" she cried, the brilliant colour deserting her cheeks. "You here?"

"As you see, madam," I answered with a mocking bow, my heart hardening, all softer feelings deserting my breast. "No thanks to your ladyship, however, that I am not at present bound for a French prison or for that equally desirable place of residence—a Moorish galley."

"Such being the case, sir," she replied quickly, "why do you again venture where at a word from me my servants will arrest you?"

"Because, madam," I answered coolly, "circumstances have arisen that no longer render your servants dangerous to me—and that also place your ladyship in a somewhat unenviable position."

"I do not understand you, sir," she said coldly. "And I do not know what sins I have committed that heaven should send me the degradation of again having you beneath my roof; but if you have anything to say to me, I pray you be as brief as possible."

"Then I will come to the point, madam," I answered calmly. "To be brief, James has been signally defeated upon the banks of the Boyne, and fled, like the craven he is, to lick the boots of his master Louis. William is in Dublin. The star of the Stuarts is set for ever!"

She could not altogether suppress a start of surprise at my words; but the next moment she had drawn herself erect and her eyes blazed with scorn.

"It is not true!" she cried passionately. "It is not true! I will *not* believe! Yet her face had grown of marble whiteness.

"Madam," I replied coolly, "that I again venture my person beneath your roof should be sufficient warrant of the truth of my words. The messenger has but just arrived in the village. More than that, in a few minutes your own steward will be here to confirm my statement."

"Yet," she faltered, struggling against the conviction of the truth. "But no—it is impossible! You are lying to me, sir," she continued in a firmer tone. "There were brave men, experienced soldiers, with James. Would he be so base as to desert those who risked their lives and fortunes for him?" I shrugged my shoulders carelessly.

"Do not deceive yourself, madam," I made answer. "Carry your mind back to the past. Hast James Stuart ever shown any consideration for others when his own worthless life was in danger? The man who could steal away from his palace by night, without striking one blow for his crown and kingdom, would care little what fate befell those who had supported him. Your own heart tells you that I speak the truth," I ended quietly.

She raised her hand in a gesture half of protest. "And these gentlemen?" she cried passionately. "Do you think, sir, that my brother is a man to seek safety in flight? To desert those who have faithfully followed him?"

"On the contrary," I answered grimly—the moment of my triumph was very near—"I *know* that he did not."

Something in my face must have attracted her attention, for I saw a sudden look of fear creep into her eyes.

"You *know?*" she faltered. "*What* do you know?"

"I am coming to that," I answered. "There is a chair beside you. Will you not be seated, madam?" I continued with mock politeness. "I fear that the tidings I have brought have not been wholly welcome to you!"

She looked at me with something of her old look of repulsion; nevertheless, I could see that she was strangely agitated as she sank into the chair that I had indicated. I took a step nearer to her.

"When," I commenced slowly, "two days ago, with the generosity characteristic of you, you sent me on board that vessel, you imagined that I had passed out of your life for ever. But there was one thing you had omitted to take into consideration—the nature of the man with whom you had to deal. I am no child to sit down and accept my fate with folded hands, but a man skilful in resource, and of much experience. Moreover, the debt between us is over heavy."

"All this is superfluous, sir," she interrupted. "If there is nothing else for me to hear——?"

"Very well, madam," I continued. "I forgot that this

could have very little interest for you. Suffice it, then, to say that I escaped from this vessel at no small risk to myself, and drifted throughout the night, without food, without shelter, in an open boat—alone."

"Still, sir," she said impatiently, half rising from her chair, "I do not see the connection——"

I checked her with a movement of my hand. "I pray you hear me out, madam," I continued firmly. "I promise you that I shall not detain you long. At daybreak this morning I was sighted by a small brig, whose master thereupon bore down to my assistance and took me on board. This little vessel I found had come from Ireland, and she carried one passenger on board—a gentleman!"

I paused and gazed fixedly at my lady. She did not speak, but I heard her catch her breath sharply, and again I saw that look of fear in her eyes. I think that at last she had a suspicion of the truth.

"He was a very handsome gentleman, of a singularly noble presence; and his face seemed in a manner to be familiar to me. This, again, can be of little interest to you, madam."

Again I paused; then I continued more slowly:—

"I will not dwell longer upon the events of the day, but will merely state that some few hours ago, in the company of this gentleman, I left the vessel. There were but our two selves in the boat, madam, and by some misadventure it capsized in landing, whereby my companion sustained somewhat severe injury."

My lady gave a cry of pain, and again as I looked at

her white, drawn face I felt the same chill, shrinking sensation I had experienced in the wood. But I resolutely put it from me and continued:

"I bore him in safety to the land, madam, and procuring assistance, had him carried—but there, it cannot interest your ladyship where he was carried; I left him in safe hands, however, and it was in passing through the village on my way here that I learned the news that I have already related to you."

She had risen to her feet while I was speaking, and now faced me with trembling limbs and heaving bosom.

"And—this—this gentleman?" she almost whispered.

I drew still nearer to her and met her gaze firmly. It was the moment of my revenge.

"Is Cecil Ingram, Earl of Cleeve, whose life is forfeit upon English soil, and whom one word of mine consigns—to the block!"

There was silence in the room—silence unbroken. Twice she raised her hand to her throat and essayed to speak, but no words came from her trembling lips. Then she swayed slightly so that she was fain to seek the support of a small table that stood beside the chair in which she had been sitting. I took a quick step towards her, for I thought that she would fall; but she waived me back and struggled to regain a momentary composure. Ah, my lady, my lady! If you had never suffered in your life before, you suffered then, as there rose before your eyes the vision of a ruined house—a fallen cause—a brother's trial—the Tower—the scaffold!

"The proof?" she gasped at length, her hands pressed to her bosom, her eyes like those of an animal at bay. "The proof of what you say?"

"Is here," I answered, unbuckling the rapier at my side and laying it upon the table before her. "Doubtless you will recognise your brother's sword!"

She bent to scan the hilt, and a low moan of pain escaped her lips.

"Or if you seek still further evidence," I continued relentlessly, "I have that also. Do you know this ring, madam?" and I stripped the ruby from my finger and held it out to her.

She took it from my hand, and even as she did so my thoughts flew back to our first meeting in that very hall, when she had so scornfully refused to accept the warrant of arrest from me; but now fear and misfortune had broken down her pride. I suppose that the ring itself was a family heirloom, for it required but a single glance for her to recognise it.

"It is his ring—his ring!" she cried; then in a broken voice she added: "God—help—us!"

Her trembling knees would no longer support her; she sank back into the chair, and flinging out her arms upon the table, bowed her proud head upon them and gave way to passionate weeping.

And I—I stood there by the table gazing down at her with a host of conflicting emotions in my breast. The thought, indeed, crossed my mind that this might be but another trick simulated to arouse my compassion; but in a moment I put the idea from me. This was no pre-

tence, but the despairing sobs of one who had abandoned hope. And it was precisely the one thing that I had not taken into account. That she would meet me with anger and defiance I had taken for granted; that this attitude would then give way to one of pleading I had also equally imagined and had been prepared to gloat over her humiliation. But this hopeless misery disarmed me. My lady proud, my lady scornful—that was but natural, was but the fitting heritage of her birth and beauty. But my lady in tears was a factor so improbable that it had never entered into my calculations. As I stood, gazing upon her bowed head, minute by minute I felt my former anger against her evaporating. And then on a sudden, a strange thing happened. For before my eyes rose a vision of my father long since dead. Of a manly, kindly hearted, stainless gentleman, whose creed had been, "A gentleman's word is his bond," and whose life had been spent in living up to those ideals which the majority of men admire but disregard. Following this, came one of a sweet-faced, gentle mother, gazing at me with sad, reproachful eyes—a pure, spiritual face that seemed to stand between me and the object of my vengeance, pleading with me to show mercy for the sake of their common womanhood. How long the vision lasted I do not know, but I uttered a stifled cry and covered my eyes with my hand. When I removed the latter it was gone, and I saw only the brightly lighted room and the stricken figure of the woman before me. But though my knees were trembling and the perspiration gathered thickly on my forehead, a strange new resolution was

forming in my breast. I felt like a man who had been snatched from the edge of a precipice, and I shuddered to think how near I had come to the brink—how near I had come to bartering man's highest privilege—that of protection—for the sake of an empty revenge. A revenge, too, directed by me—I, a strong man, against a lady—a woman—God's finished work!

My first feeling was one of overwhelming shame, but following hard upon this a great pity filled my breast. Thank God I was still a gentleman!

"Madam!" I said gently, bending over the table.

She did not raise her head; her sobs had ceased; she was very still. Something in her attitude attracted my attention. I passed round the table and lightly touched her arm; then, meeting with no response, I sank on my knees at her side and gently drew one arm from before her face. It was as I had thought—she had fainted. Seeing this, I raised her tenderly, so that her head rested upon the cushions of the chair; then I fell to chafing her cold hands. And at this moment, as I knelt with my lady's hand in mine, there came the sound of hurried footsteps in the hall, the door was flung wide open, and on the threshold stood the Earl of Cleeve himself, and behind him Mistress Grace.

To say that I was surprised at the sudden appearance of the man whom but an hour before I had left lying in the fisherman's hut, to all appearance grievously wounded, would but inadequately describe my feelings. So astounded was I, that I remained staring up at him still with my lady's hand in mine. He had removed the

bandage from his forehead and the long, ragged scar showed plainly in the light.

"Your Grace?" I stammered; and again: "Your Grace?"

I rose to my feet and fell back a few paces. And as with a cry of fear and compassion Mistress Grace hurried to her sister's side, the earl stepped forward and confronted me.

"Aye," he answered, his voice stern and cold, his courteous manner disappeared. "I suppose my unlooked-for appearance upsets your plans, sir. I thank God I am in time to save my sister's honour."

I started as if I had received a blow.

"Her honour!" was all that I could stammer. "Her honour!"

"I have said it," he answered coldly, at the same time possessing himself of the sword which I had foolishly left upon the table. "The old man yonder was no fool. I am acquainted with your unsavoury reputation, and followed fast upon your heels. Once at the village it was an easy matter to procure a horse." In a moment I saw it all. The old man must at some time have heard my name—doubtless when he had been drinking at the inn. I remembered how that De Brito had used it at our meeting in the hut; and this, coupled with the latter's uniform, had enabled him to put two and two together with a shrewdness that I had not given him credit for. Of course it was all plain to me now. After my departure he had found means to arouse the earl from his swoon, and the latter had followed me with but

"On the threshold stood the Earl of Cleeve himself"

little delay. I cursed myself for my lack of foresight.

"You are mad," I answered, coming to myself. All those schemes which were forming in my brain were shattered to pieces by his unlooked-for appearance. "Mad to venture hither! Have you not heard——?"

"If you mean, sir, have I heard of the ruin of the cause to which I had devoted my life, I answer that I have, both that and many things. And I am here to perform a solemn duty. It is to rid the world of a very dirty scoundrel."

I felt the hot blood flush my brow.

"Your Grace," I answered, striving to speak calmly, "if you will permit me to explain——"

"Enough of words, sir," he cried impatiently. "The honour of my house is dear to me, and honour forbids that men like you should invade its threshold and contrive such work as that! He nodded as he spoke to where my lady still remained, unconscious despite her sister's efforts to revive her.

"But," I muttered, cudgelling my brains to discover some means whereby I might evade him, "I have no quarrel with your Grace—and no sword."

"For the first, sir," he replied haughtily, "I am the best judge. And for the second, 'tis a matter that can be easily remedied." He stepped quickly to the wall as he spoke, and took therefrom a beautiful duelling rapier, which he measured beside his own. Then turning, he held the two out to me.

"Choose which you will," he said briefly.

Mechanically I took one from his hand, for my ears had caught a distant sound from without, and I felt that I would welcome any interruption at that moment that would give me a little time for thought. Nearer now and nearer came the sound of a man's running steps. They did not pause at the outer entrance, but came right on across the hall, and the next moment the steward burst into the room. His face was pale, the perspiration stood out upon his brow, he panted so heavily that he could scarcely speak.

"Fly, my lord, fly!" he gasped brokenly. "The dragoons are in the village."

"Dragoons?" I cried, starting.

"Aye," he said excitedly, "Dutch dragoons from Meriden—a score of them. They know that you are at the manor," he continued, turning to his master and wringing his hands helplessly. "In three minutes they will be here. God help us all! We are undone!"

Meriden! In a flash I understood. Now I saw the meaning of De Brito's words. He had known to these troops being quartered there, and to revenge himself upon me had gone to their commander. Whether he had guessed the real quality of the wounded man or what tale he had concocted I do not know; but it had been powerful enough to induce that officer to send a force to the hut to investigate the matter. Arrived there—well, the times were rough, and too well I knew their methods. They had speedily discovered all they desired to know and had then followed at top speed, hoping, doubtless, to

pick up some share of the reward. Truly there was no hope now, for the man before me.

All this had passed through my mind as it were in a moment. I was roused by hearing the earl's voice.

"Dragoons?" he was saying. "Yes—summoned by this gentleman!"

"It is not true!" I answered firmly. "Until now, your Grace, I was as ignorant as you yourself that they were in the neighbourhood."

"It matters little," he replied sternly, drawing his rapier and flinging the empty sheath from him. "I have still three minutes left to me. I trust that in that time I shall kill you!" I stood hesitating, for I knew not what to do. On a sudden Mistress Grace ran swiftly to his side.

"Cecil, Cecil!" she cried in a voice of agony, "why do you linger here? Why do you waste the precious moments? Fly—fly whilst there is time! Did you not hear? In a few minutes it will be too late!"

"It is too late now," he answered, "and I have other work to do!"

Down at his feet she flung herself and clung with her little hands around his knees, so that for the moment he could not move.

"No, no!" she cried piteously, raising her tear-dimmed face to his. "It is not yet too late—not yet! Cecil, I entreat—I implore you for your own sake—for all our sakes—to save your life! The window is open—they cannot see the way you go!"

"And leave this man to point them on my track," he

answered bitterly. "You do not understand. My presence here is known. The whole countryside would be searched. I am no Monmouth to be taken in a ditch. And on my honour, I leave not Cleeve till I have fought this man."

I looked at the firm, set face before me, and knew that though death stared him in the face he would keep his word. His sister knew it also, for with a low, moaning cry she released her hold. Then he strode towards me.

"Draw, sir," he cried. "Men credit you at least with skill in swordplay."

Then, seeing that I made no movement to lay hand to hilt, he added: "Must I strike you to arouse your courage? Are you a coward, sir, as well as a ruffian?"

But during the last few moments I had been thinking rapidly. I looked to the past, and saw little there to cheer me or regret. I looked to the future, and down the vista of the years to come I saw myself sink ever lower until it might be some chance tavern brawl found me at length a nameless grave. My glance wandered to my lady and——

"There is no need," I answered quietly. "I will fight your Grace, but not here, where at any moment we may be interrupted. As the person challenged, I have the right of choosing the ground, and I claim my right. At the foot of the cliff path leading to the beach there is a level stretch of sand. That is the spot I choose."

"As you will," the earl answered. "I care not for the

place, so it be at once." And he strode out through the open window.

But no sooner had he disappeared than the apathy that had held me seemed to vanish. My brain was clear, my will unshaken. I stepped swiftly to where Mistress Grace still knelt upon the floor, her face buried in her hands.

"Listen," I cried quickly, raising her gently to her feet. "You are brave, madam—I am sure that you are brave. There is much depends upon you. Try, then, to recover yourself—for your brother's sake."

She raised her face to mine. I know not what she read there, but on a sudden I saw a new light flash into her eyes, and she laid her two hands upon my breast.

"You," she whispered—"you are going to save him!"

"With heaven's help I am," I answered quickly. "There is a chance yet—it is a desperate one! Your part, madam, must be to hinder these men as long as possible. Use your woman's wit. Bid them search the house. Delay them but ten minutes, and all may yet be well."

"But my sister?" she faltered, casting a lingering glance at my lady's unconscious figure.

"You must act for her," I said rapidly. "There is no time to lose. Listen!"

I raised my hand to enjoin silence. Far away down the avenue came the trampling of horse. "They are coming! Now, madam, will you trust me?"

She stretched out her hands impulsively. "With all our lives," she whispered.

I bowed my head in silence. I could not speak. Her sweet, womanly trust in me was yet another link to bind me to my purpose. The next moment she had left the room and I heard her close and bolt the heavy outer door. Then I turned upon the steward.

"Answer," I cried, taking him by the shoulders, "and briefly, man. Is the boat still there below the cliff?"

"Yes," he replied, catching something of my own energy.

"And know you of any craft in the harbour that would venture the coast of France to-night for gold?"

"Aye," he answered, "or for love of the master. Nevertheless, there is the money collected last week from the rents——"

"Then fetch it," I cried, interrupting him, "and follow to the beach. Haste, man, haste! The precious moments are fleeting fast!"

Without a word he turned away, and left me standing in the centre of the room. Then once again I drew near, it might be for the last time, and gazed down into my lady's lovely face, now so white and still. One slender hand hung at her side. I stooped and, half timidly, put out my own towards it. On a sudden, I know not why, a sense of my unworthiness came over me. I bent lower still, and, raising the hem of her gown, pressed it to my lips. Then I passed out into the night.

CHAPTER XV

OF THE COMING OF THE DUTCH DRAGOONS

At the little bridge over the moat, the tall figure of my antagonist had halted, but upon my appearance on the terrace he turned his back on me and strode off resolutely in the direction of the cliffs. And I—I followed him with a strange conflict raging in my breast. 'Twas not of fear for the result of the encounter, though I did not deceive myself but that I should find a formidable opponent in the man before me. At that time skill in the use of the rapier formed not the least part of the education of a gentleman, and I could not doubt but that his Grace would have benefited by the lessons of the best foreign masters. No, it was rather a knowledge of the certain penalty that the success of my scheme must exact, and a feeling that I was playing a part more worthy of a hero of *romaunt*. Yet as my lady's face as I had last seen it rose up before my eyes, I felt a simple pleasure in the thought that I could minister to her happiness. When all that I had it in my heart to perform was done, would she then think of me with scorn and loathing I wondered? Would the memory of me be but one of shuddering aversion in all the years to come? Happen what might, I knew that I could no longer deceive my own heart; that the image of this woman's face would be with me until the end. All this time I had been strid-

ing rapidly through the moonlit gardens in the wake of the earl. On reaching the pathway at the head of the cliffs I paused to cast one lingering look in the direction of the manor. Here and there I could see lights shining through the trees, but no sound came from the house to show that our flight was as yet discovered. The gardens themselves were very still. A few bats fluttered silently through the darkness. Overhead, the moon sailed higher into the heavens, across which, ever and anon, a great star flashed and vanished. From below me came up the low murmur of the tide along the shore. It was such a night as might well shame the lust of murder in men's hearts by its calm serenity. Light as it was, I found the descent of the cliff path to be little calculated to soothe the nerves of one about to engage in a duel of more than life. But the earl did not even pause in the descent—doubtless familiarity with it in his boyhood had robbed it for him of all its terrors—and for very shame's sake I followed, pressing, I will confess, as near as possible to the cliff wall upon my right and striving to avoid gazing into the abyss at my side. Arriving at length at the foot of the path, I found my antagonist already testing the surface of the patch of sand that I had chosen. I saw that the steward had spoken truth. The boat lay close to the edge of the incoming tide. For the rest, the sand was firm, and the moon rendered the spot as suitable as one could desire for the matter in hand.

"I trust that the ground meets with your Grace's approval?" I said after a short silence.

"Excellently well," he answered, turning for the first time towards me. "And now, sir, under the existing circumstances I think that we may waive the usual formalities."

As he spoke he divested himself of his outer coat and the starred and decorated one below it. This done, he tossed aside his hat and wig and stood before me in his shirt of white cambric; and then indeed, at sight of the splendid specimen of manhood thus revealed, had I been a timorous man, I might well have fallen to reckoning up my chances of success. But no thought of that entered my mind as, throwing off my own poor coat, I bared my arms to the elbow, and drawing my rapier, tested it against the side of my boot. 'Twas the one that he had taken from the wall, and was a good bit of steel, pliant and nicely weighted—as indeed it had need to have been, seeing the issues that hung upon its blade. Then I advanced to take up my position upon the sand and, saluting briefly, we fell to work and our swords crossed. Aye, and from the very first I knew that I had met an adversary whom it would tax all my skill to conquer. From the beginning he fought with a cool determination—a calm confidence of the result that did little towards steadying my somewhat wild fence of the first few moments. For my mind was busy picturing what was already happening inside the house, and every minute I expected to hear the voices of the dragoons from the cliffs above that should tell of our discovery. Never before, not even when I met and worsted Galliani, the finest blade in Italy, nor when, before Belgrade, I had slain the

celebrated Azim Alli before the eyes of two armies, was my skill in swordplay so put to the test. To and fro across the little patch of sand we thrust and parried; the rasping of our blades mingling with the lap of the encroaching waves. But never once, for all my fierce attack, could I get past that iron guard, and when, after five minutes had passed, and we drew back for a moment, as if by mutual consent, to regain our labouring breath, neither of us could boast of having gained any advantage over his opponent.

Save that the handsome face of the man before me was slightly pale, he was outwardly as calm, as self-possessed as ever, rather as if he were engaged in some friendly encounter with the foils than with an adversary whose reputation with the rapier—I speak it in all sincerity—was common talk from London to Vienna.

But the moment's breathing space had steadied my nerve, and when, in response to my brief, "On guard, sir!" our blades again crossed, the fierce joy of the combat had entered into my veins, and I resolved to put in practice a certain thrust that had been shown me many years before by an old sergeant of Papenstein's dragoons. 'Twas a sure and deadly thrust to those unknowing of its defence; and though I had no intention of pressing it home to a fatal issue, I felt assured of its success for the purpose I had in view. But to accomplish it required the utmost nicety of distance; and so, in pursuance of my object, I attacked him again so fiercely that I drove him back to the very edge of the sand. But once there my wrist weakened, my thrusts became more

and more feeble. Then, as he gave a sudden rally, I began to give ground before him. Step by step I retreated, barely keeping him at sword's point; and so well must I have played my part that, as he plyed me with thrust on thrust and I still fell back, I saw a faint smile curl his lips. And I too smiled in my heart as, without removing my eyes from his, I yet marked the exact spot where I should strike. And a moment later my chance came. For, thrusting high, as he threw up his arm to guard, I entwined my blade round his with a wrench that all but disarmed him, and in the same movement with an upward turn of the wrist I ran him through the body.

Without a groan his sword dropped from his hand, and, staggering slightly, he fell face downwards upon the sand. In a moment, throwing my own weapon from me, I was down on my knees by his side. A brief examination showed me that I had not miscalculated my thrust save by a hair's breadth from the spot that I had marked. The wound was high up in the muscles of the right breast, and my experience told me that 'twas but a matter of a week or two at most ere he was again upon his feet.

On a sudden, as I stooped over him, I heard the sound of a footstep striking against a stone, accompanied by a muffled cry. Leaping to my feet, I turned in time to see the figure of a man hurrying down the cliff path behind me. I confess that at the sight my heart almost stopped beating, for I thought that my labour had been in vain and that the dragoons were upon me. But at a second

glance I recognised the familiar figure of the steward, whose approach neither of us had heard in the heat of our late encounter. A moment later he had gained my side, and was staring down, dazed and horror stricken, upon the unconscious figure of his master.

"What is this?" he stammered, his jaw falling. "What have you done? My God, you have killed him!"

"No, fool," I answered curtly, "I have saved him!"

Yet for all the help he was capable of giving me I might as well have been without his assistance had I not caught him roughly by the arm.

"There, man," I cried quickly, "don't stand staring so! What of the dragoons?"

"They are searching the house," he answered, still in the same dazed manner.

"Then recall your wits, man," I replied. "There is not a moment to lose. Help me to lift him into the boat."

Mechanically he stooped to obey me, and together we raised the unconscious figure at our feet and laid him carefully in the stern of the boat. This done, I ran to where we had left our clothes preparatory to the encounter, and returning, flung the earl's riding coat, together with my own hat, coat and sword, into the boat, which the first incoming waves were already rocking. Then I signed to the steward to enter.

"Now," I said briefly, "play the man if you would save your master's life. Do not delay to attend his wound—a little bloodletting will do him no harm; and it were better he should remain unconscious, since of his own free will he would not escape. Pull straight for the vil-

lage. Once there, spare not your gold, man. Remember, he must be well on his way to France to-night."

"But you?—you are not coming too?" he cried.

"No," I answered somewhat sadly; "I have other work to do. You can handle an oar?"

"In my youth," he answered doubtfully. "But of what use is it? Such craft as are in the harbour will not float until high tide, and that will not be for another hour. They will ride back to the village and will search the vessels there."

I remembered then that he spoke the truth. The stone jetty all but enclosed a small harbour, inside which, save at high tide, the fishing craft lay high and dry. Well, 'twas but another danger to be met in the part that I was about to play. "Have no fear of that," I replied. "They will not continue their search. I will answer for it."

"Not for such a prize as that?" he said doubtingly, nodding towards the unconscious figure in the stern.

"Man, man," I cried impatiently, "you are wasting precious moments! I tell you they will not search further because—the earl will be here."

As I spoke I thrust the oars into his hands, and with a powerful heave I sent the little boat dancing out upon the water. And the final impression I had of it was of the bewildered face of the steward as he pondered upon my last words, of which I could see he had not grasped the meaning. But turning on my heel, I strode back up the beach to the scene of our late encounter, and swiftly donned the earl's bedecorated

coat, peruke and hat. This done, I picked up his richly jewelled sword and thrust it into the sheath. Then I turned to look at the boat.

Already it had passed beyond the point of rock at the head of the little bay, and nothing met my eyes but the empty waste of waters. Slowly I returned to the water's edge and pondered upon my next move. So far everything had succeeded as I had planned, and there but remained for me to play the final part. How still was the night! How lonely the spot! Overhead, a myriad stars studded the dark vault of heaven and were reflected in the placid water beneath. The moon looked down upon me and threw my shadow black upon the beach. The ripple of the waves amongst the pebbles at my feet was as some soul-inspiring melody guiding and beckoning me upward along the path of honour. I had turned, with the intention of again seeking the gardens, when a shout from above caused me to raise my head. I saw at a glance that all further initiative was taken from my hands. Here and there lanterns flashed upon the cliffs, and in their light I caught the glint of steel. The cry was quickly caught up and answered from different directions, and a moment later several dark figures appeared upon the path. I came to a standstill and awaited their approach, for it occurred to me that the longer I could possibly delay them, the better would be the earl's chance of escape. So I drew my sword and stood out full in the moonlight, a noble-looking figure, I make no doubt, in my rich dress, beneath which, nevertheless, my heart was beating painfully. At a nearer approach I

recognised the blue coats and white facings of William's Dutch dragoons. They were part of the troops I imagined that had been hastily sent for from The Hague at the commencement of the present crisis, when James's landing in Ireland had thrown the nation into a state of panic. That they did not relish the pathway down which they must come was apparent to me; nevertheless, a tall officer, followed by some half dozen troopers, slowly made their way to the beach. At the foot of the path he halted for a moment until his men had spread out in a half circle behind him. Then he advanced towards me.

"Surrender!" he cried in English, though with a strong foreign accent.

"It would appear, sir," I replied in his own language, of which I had gained a fair knowledge in my campaigns in Flanders, "that there is no other choice left to me."

At my words his face was almost ludicrous in its surprise. He was a tall man, as I have said, and of a most melancholy countenance. I took him to be one of those unfortunates whom promotion persistently passes over.

"How?" he cried. "Your lordship speaks Dutch?"

I made him a low bow by way of answer. It was as well to sustain my part.

"As you hear for yourself, sir," I replied.

"Then," he answered, dropping his English, and taking a step nearer to me, "I have the honour to arrest you, my lord, in the name of his Majesty, King William!"

I raised my hand in deprecation.

"One moment, sir," I replied coolly. "Ere I render you my sword, I must also have the honour of knowing to

whom I am to deliver myself. Might I warn you to withdraw your foot—you are just within sword-reach, and I am somewhat over-hasty."

He drew back quickly at that. The troopers closed in nearer to me. Stout-looking fellows they were for the most part and eager, I could see, to begin the affray. But the melancholy officer made no sign; on the contrary: "If that be all," he answered with a touch of pride, "I think that I can satisfy your lordship. I am Pieter Van Someren, lieutenant in his Majesty's Delft dragoons, and son of the burgomaster of that town."

Again I swept him a low bow. "And pardon me!" I continued, raising my eyebrows. "In command of these troops, may I ask?" I thought that his face fell somewhat.

"Well, no," he said hesitatingly. "To speak truth, my commanding officer is above; but the pathway is not to his liking, and—well—" he added, shrugging his shoulders, "he is from the ranks."

There was that in his tone which caught my attention and of which I was quick to take advantage.

"Yet he is in command, nevertheless, by your own confession.

"Sir," I answered haughtily, "you are a man of birth yourself. You will readily understand that it is against my honour to surrender save to the officer of senior rank."

For a moment he hesitated, and I could see there was a struggle going on in his breast. True, they might overpower me by a concerted attack, but there was also the

risk of my being killed in the struggle, in which case farewell to all hope of the reward offered for my apprehension—or rather for that of the man whom I was impersonating. At the same time I had appealed to him as to an equal, and to be thus classed was flattering to his pride. I knew what his reply would be ere he opened his lips.

"As you please!" he said stiffly. And turning to one of the troopers, he gave a rapid order that sent the man hurrying back by the way that they had come.

So there, after the sounds of his departing footsteps had died away upon the path, we remained in the same attitudes facing each other; all save the lieutenant, who withdrew a few paces apart, where he could command a better view of the man's progress. Suddenly he uttered a quick exclamation

"What is this?" he cried, stooping to examine something at his feet. "This sand is all trampled—and there is blood here!"

For a moment I confess that I was taken aback, but only for a moment; then the wit that nature had given me asserted itself. "Ah," I said, coolly, "a little affair of honour, sir, before your arrival."

"But," he replied, looking up at me with a puzzled air, "what of your opponent, my lord?"

I shrugged my shoulders carelessly. "The sea has its secrets, sir," I replied, meeting his gaze frankly. "It is a safe hiding place."

He glanced searchingly over the moonlit surface of the

water, as if he half expected to see the body there; I could tell that he was not wholly satisfied. But like a sensible man, he forebore to question me further. After all, what concern was it of his? Had he not already made his name famous by my capture? Small time, indeed, had he for speculation, for already the first waves were rippling gently over the sand, blotting out in a moment all traces of the recent conflict. And had we needed a further diversion, it was provided for us by the appearance of his commanding officer upon the path. Preceded and followed by a trooper, he slowly and reluctantly descended. The men had fastened their belts together and held them like a rope to keep him from the edge; but notwithstanding this precaution, it could be seen how he clung to the cliff upon his right, and upon a nearer approach could be heard to be alternately bemoaning the errand that put him in so perilous a position and conjuring his men to proceed with greater caution. I thought that a smile of contempt flitted for a moment across the face of the lieutenant, but catching my eye, it vanished instantly and he stepped to the foot of the path to await their coming. The descent safely accomplished, he presently returned, accompanied by a short, stout officer, whose appearance seemed more suited to the wine shops of The Hague than to the rocky cliffs of Devon.

"This is Major Verbrughen!" the lieutenant said curtly.

I held out my sword to the man at his side.

"Then to you, sir," I said quietly, "I surrender myself

on parole. I trust that you have not been put to inconvenience in satisfying my honour?"

"To great inconvenience," he answered bluntly; "for which I, for one, see no necessity. But you—you English are so proud! What a country! What a road! I am a soldier—not a fly; and I do not like such work."

What further he would have added I do not know, for the lieutenant drew him aside and began to speak to him in a low voice.

Meantime I turned my back upon them all to escape the gaze of the troopers, who had throughout stood stolidly regarding me, no doubt appraising in their own minds the value of the orders upon my breast. But presently the two men's voices rose louder, and I caught scraps of their conversation.

"A thousand crowns!"—it was the major's voice. "Ah, my Wilmina! Little did I dream of this when last I bade thee good-bye; but thou shalt see that I will keep my word. Yes, yes, the little house that I have so often promised thee shall be thine own at last!"

"I would have you remember, however, Major Verbrughen," the lieutenant's voice replied, "that to me belongs the credit of this arrest."

"So! good lieutenant, I will not fail to make mention of you!" the other answered.

"It is not mention that I desire," the lieutenant said sourly. "But for me the man might well have escaped, and I shall lay claim to the reward."

"You?" the other cried hotly. "You will lay claim?"

"Why not?" the lieutenant answered, raising his voice.

"Was it not my suggestion to search the gardens? Am I to do all the work and gain no profit by it?"

"And am I not in command here?" the major cried angrily; "and was it not to me that he surrendered? *You* to receive a thousand crowns? Why, 'twould be squandered at the first gaming table you sat down to!"

"And you to spend them on your Wilmina?" the lieutenant retorted with a sneer. "Why, she has forgotten your very name ere this."

"It is false!" the major shouted, beside himself with rage.

"You shall answer to me for your words, Major Verbrughen!" cried the other in a tone equally as loud.

I turned swiftly upon my heel and faced them. The major's face was purple with passion, the lieutenant stood with his hand upon his sword. In the background the troopers remained standing, like so many blue-coated statues. Here was an unexpected chance of gaining time.

"Gentlemen," I said, advancing towards them, "in that I could not help overhearing part of your conversation, I pray you pardon me. It would seem that the matter at issue is one calling rather for deeds than words. The night is still young, and the light will serve. I shall be happy to act as second to either of you gentlemen, and I make no doubt that one of your men will be equally willing to serve in a similar capacity."

They both turned in my direction, and for a moment they stood silent, glancing first at me and then at one another.

"I am at all times ready to uphold my words," said the lieutenant, still fingering his sword hilt. But it seemed that my very eagerness had defeated its own purpose, for——

"And I—I do not fight when engaged upon duty," said the major stiffly. "I thank your lordship for the reminder. Lieutenant Someren, we will discuss this matter later. But the tide is rising fast, and it is full time that we returned to the house." He turned as he spoke and cast a lingering look at the narrow path. Is there no other way by which we can go, my lord?" he added hesitatingly.

"None," I answered, inwardly cursing myself for my stupidity in interfering. Had I not done so it might well have been that the quarrel would have led to blows and more time might have been gained. Now, however, it was too late, and all that I could do was to cast about in my mind for some means by which I might still further delay them. I thought that the major gave a slight groan upon hearing my reply. "Lieutenant Someren," he said after a moment's pause, "take four men and lead the way."

The lieutenant saluted, not a muscle of his lean face moving. Apparently he had forgotten their late estrangement and became once more a military machine. As the little party moved away: "Now, my lord," the major continued, turning towards me, "be good enough to follow!"

I shrugged my shoulders lightly and obeyed him. He himself brought up the rear with the remaining three

troopers. It was not lost upon me that the burly sergeant immediately behind me carried his pistol in his hand. Evidently he was a man of precaution and did not put the same confidence in my parole as did his superior officers. In this order, then, we commenced the ascent; nor could I wonder that to men accustomed to the flat country of Holland the task should be so unwelcome. Even I, though by this time I had gained a tolerable acquaintance with the path, could not but be moved by the weirdness of the scene. The moon threw our shadows black against the cliff, accentuating the darkness of the gulf at our side, from which, growing ever fainter as we ascended, rose up the low murmur of the tide. It was some little time, therefore, ere we gained the summit, to find a couple more troopers in waiting there. With the major and lieutenant on either side of me—preserving, however, a strict silence towards each other—and with the troopers in our rear, I passed once more and for the last time through the misty, rose-scented gardens that were filled for me with so many memories. Nor could I, for all my efforts, put the penalty that I must pay wholly from my mind. For what had I done? I, a soldier, had betrayed my trust! Had assisted a noted rebel to escape! and for what? Was it not for a mere shadowy sentiment such as a man of my experience and years should not have been guilty? But though I strove thus to reason with myself, I know that the beating of my heart increased the nearer that we approached the lighted windows of the house. For all my thoughts centred then upon what my lady would say to me, and how I should

first reveal myself to her, so that the men at my side should have no suspicion of the imposture practised on them.

But do what I would, I could think of no way by which I could prepare those at the house, for my brain was in a chaos, and only the image of my lady's face was before my eyes. Already we had reached the little bridge and, crossing, passed slowly down the terrace to where a broad stream of light came from the open door and lay in a white patch upon the gravel walk. As we passed the lighted windows of the dining hall, I strove to gain a glimpse of the interior; but the curtains had fallen to—I could see nothing. Clearly I must trust to luck that they should not betray me in their surprise.

Entering, I found some dozen troopers lounging in the hall, who sprang to attention upon our appearance. Through the open door beyond I caught sight of their horses at the foot of the broad entrance steps. In the passage leading to the servants' quarters three or four of my lady's women were huddled together, gazing upon the scene before them with white, scared faces. I bent my head as I passed through, that they might not see my face, and with the two officers at my heels I entered the dining hall—to find it empty.

For a moment I do not know whether in my heart I was the more disappointed or relieved to find it so. But the fact gave me time at least to collect my scattered thoughts. Already I reckoned that it could want barely another half hour until it should be high tide. I turned suddenly to the major.

"May I ask, sir," I said calmly, "from what source you received the information as to my presence here?"

"As to that," he replied readily, "I cannot tell you. I do but obey my orders."

"Ah," I answered. "And you come——?"

"From Plymouth," he replied. "But our regiment lies to-night at Meriden."

"And—pardon me—is it your intention to return thither at once?"

For a moment he hesitated. I think that the prospect of the long Devon miles lying between him and his comfortable quarters held but little attraction for him.

"That will depend upon the condition of our horses, my lord," he said at length. "We have ridden far and fast to-day."

A sudden inspiration occurred to me. "Then do me the favour, gentlemen, to look upon me as your host for the short time that you remain beneath this roof. Even misfortune must wait upon hospitality. And a bottle of wine is no mean antidote for a long night ride."

I saw his eyes begin to sparkle. Nevertheless, he still made pretence to hesitate.

"Certainly I have no orders for immediate return," he said slowly. "What think you, lieutenant?"

"You are in command, Major Verbrughen," the latter answered stiffly. He had withdrawn a few paces apart, yet even his melancholy countenance showed no disapproval at the prospect.

"Well, well," the major continued, turning towards me.

"I—will look at the horses myself." And turning abruptly on his heel, he left the room.

When we were alone I slowly crossed to the hearth, and with my back to the lieutenant, who on his part did not seem particularly desirous of conversation, I fell to thinking of all the fateful events of the day. It was whilst standing thus, that happening to raise my eyes to the broad mirror that hung above the carven mantelpiece, I saw that which banished in a moment all other thoughts from my mind. For my lady herself was in the room! I had heard no door open—no sound of footfall. Yet there, at the foot of the steps leading to the corridor above, she stood motionless, and behind her Mistress Grace.

My lady's face was white, though still she strove to bear herself with pride. Her sister made no effort to conceal her tears. In the background I caught sight of the lieutenant bowing profoundly. Slowly, slowly she crossed the floor towards me. And I?—I stood rooted to the spot, incapable alike of speech or movement, my heart beating with a rapidity that was not far removed from pain.

Within a yard of me she stopped, and I saw her struggling with her emotion—saw the tears gathering upon her lashes—and I alone heard the low sob of anguish that escaped her lips. And hearing that, I thanked God in my heart that I had done what I had. A moment later her white hands were laid upon my shoulders, and "Cecil!" she whispered brokenly.

And then indeed I turned—and our eyes met.

CHAPTER XVI

OF HOW I REPAID THE DEBT I OWED MY LADY

For a moment—a moment containing in itself a lifelong memory—we two stood face to face in a silence broken only by a low cry from Mistress Grace, as for the first time she caught sight of me.

But no sound came from my lady's parted lips, only, recoiling from me in the extremity of her surprise, still with her eyes on mine, she raised one hand as if to repel me, whilst with the other she pushed the loosened hair from off her brow. Then, drawing a deep breath, I caught her outstretched hand in mine, and, shielded by her figure from the gaze of the lieutenant, I laid my finger on my lips, at the same time saying in a low voice so that none but she could hear: "Madam, madam, do not look so at me! It is I, indeed! If you would save your brother's life help me to detain these men." And dropping her hand, I stepped backwards, for I dared no longer trust myself to maintain my composure. Even as it was I felt my voice quiver.

To recover myself, I turned swiftly to Mistress Grace, and taking her hands in mine, I stooped as if to kiss her cheek, at the same time whispering in her ear: "Madam, I have redeemed my word. He is safe and on his way to France. Time—time now is everything!"

I felt her hands tighten in my own. "And you—you

have taken his place?" she whispered in reply, raising her eyes, still with the traces of tears in them, to mine.

"Hush—yes!" I answered, with a warning glance in the direction of the lieutenant. More than that I could not say, for at this moment the major returned to the room. He paused in astonishment on the threshold, and I saw that his eyes were fixed in open admiration upon my lady. I took a step or two towards him.

"Forgive me, gentlemen," I said aloud. "I do not know whether my sisters are already known to you."

"This lady," the major answered, indicating Mistress Grace, and speaking to my surprise in very fair English, "I have already met. Madam, your wife—no."

I dared not meet my lady's eyes.

"Your pardon, sir," I said hastily, feeling the hot blood mounting to my forehead—"my sister also!"

"So!" he said, raising his eyebrows and making what he no doubt intended for a bow in her direction. "Then it is for me to beg the pardon."

I glanced at my lady. There was a lovely blush upon her face that a moment before had been so pale; otherwise she showed no trace of her late emotion, acknowledging his bow with a stately inclination of her head.

"It is granted, sir," she answered quietly.

"And as to your intentions, major?" I said in Dutch. "Will you partake of our hospitality?"

"Well," he replied, "it seems to me discourteous to refuse your offer, my lord, and the horses are certainly in ill condition," he added apologetically. "What say you, lieutenant?"

The latter's sallow visage bore a look of satisfaction at his decision. "I am of your mind, Major Verbrughen," he answered, the reserve with which he had clothed himself gradually relaxing.

"Then that is settled, gentlemen," I said decisively. And turning to Mistress Grace, I continued in a low voice: "Will you be good enough to see that these men are served in the north parlour, madam? a bottle or two of wine—of the strongest, you understand?—and such fare as you possess. I have that which I would say to your sister—alone. Will you do this for me?"

She gave me a glance full of meaning. "It is not much that I can do," she whispered in reply. "That which I can—willingly," and she prepared to leave the room.

Again I addressed myself to the two officers. They had drawn together in a more friendly attitude while I was speaking and were conversing in low tones.

"If you will accompany this lady, gentlemen," I said aloud, "she will herself attend to your welfare. Meanwhile, I beg that you will hold me excused from joining you. With your permission I would speak with—my sister—in private." And I glanced across at where my lady still stood upon the hearth, with her eyes ever upon my face.

But for a moment the major hesitated. "As to that," he said at length, "I do not know what to say."

"Sir," I made answer, drawing myself haughtily erect, "I have yet to learn that an Earl of Cleeve ever broke his parole. For the matter of that, the parlour where

you sup is but across the hall; by leaving the door open you may see into this room."

"Well, well," the major replied, stroking his chin perplexedly, "seeing that it may be for the—eh, lieutenant?"

"Precisely," the latter answered.

"Under the circumstances then, my lord," he continued, "the favour is granted. And now—at your service, madam!"

He bowed as he spoke to Mistress Grace and together they followed her from the room.

And my lady and I were at length alone. No sooner had the last sound of their spurred heels died away across the hall than the pride which had hitherto sustained her seemed to vanish. She came quickly towards me, and I saw that she was strangely moved, and that her limbs were trembling.

"What is this, sir?" she cried in a voice that thrilled with suppressed emotion. "What is this that you have done? My brother was in your power, and yet you are here!—And in his dress—I do not understand."

"Nor have I time to explain, madam," I answered gravely. "Your brother is safe, and the vessel that is bearing him to France should by this time have cleared the harbour. Once there, he will no doubt be doubly welcome to James in his exile. "As for these clothes," I continued humbly, glancing down at the glittering orders upon my breast, "I crave your pardon that I must wear them yet a little longer. Do not misjudge me,

madam, when you know the truth. Believe only that there was no other way."

"I think that we have always misjudged you, sir," she answered in a trembling voice. "I think that we never understood—never tried to understand—until now!" She moved as she spoke so as to command a view of the open doorway. Then on a sudden she turned swiftly towards me. "They do not look this way," she cried in an eager voice. "Come, sir, come—I will be your guide—follow me and you may yet evade them!" And hastening to the nearest window, she drew aside the heavy curtains, only to drop them again with a little despairing cry. But not before I had seen.

Outside, upon the terrace, motionless as a statue, stood a blue-coated trooper. The moonlight shone upon the barrel of his short musketoon.

"You see, madam," I said quietly—I had not moved from my place—"it is impossible." And I gazed at her in a kind of wonder. Had it been another I could have sworn that she was anxious. "Even had it been otherwise, my lady," I continued, "I could not have availed myself of the opportunity. For my honour now has become dear to me, and honour forbids that I should break my parole to these men. Yet it is sweet to me also that you should care for my safety."

"Ah, but—but what will they do to you?" she cried, and I saw a sudden fear leap into her eyes.

I drew a deep breath ere I replied. "Madam," I made answer, "imprisonment is no heavy matter for me."

"Imprisonment?" she cried quickly, drawing a few

paces nearer and gazing full into my face. "But you are sure that is all?"

I met her glance as bravely as I could. She must not guess the truth. "Quite sure," I answered quietly.

Yet still for a moment longer her eyes clung to mine. Then a little sob escaped her lips.

"After all," she muttered, her head drooping—two scarlet spots appearing in her cheeks,—"when the truth is known, it may be that they will set you free."

"Yes, madam," I answered somewhat sadly, "I think that they will set me free."

She turned away to hide some sudden emotion. When next she faced me her proud face was so softened that I stared at her in dumb surprise.

"Mr. Cassilis," she said in a trembling voice—and I saw that there were tears in her eyes that she made no effort to conceal—"do you remember what once you said to me—here in this very room—that you would one day repay me with tenfold interest? I think that you have already repaid—and I—no words of mine can speak my sorrow—or my shame!"

"Madam, madam," I cried hoarsely, finding at length my voice, "what is this? I will not hear!"

"You will not hear?" she said in a tone of wonder.

"No, madam," I muttered. "I would not have you abase yourself for me."

She bent her head so that I could no longer see her face, but yet her lovely figure trembled with some suppressed emotion. "You do this for my brother," she said at length with a sad little smile, "you risk imprisonment—

disgrace—for him—and yet I may not even thank you!"

I looked at her, and all the love in my heart leaped into sudden flame. "Nay, madam," I said gently, "it was for your sake!"

"For my sake—for me?" she cried in a trembling voice.

"Aye, madam," I answered, "for you—*for you*—and therefore death itself were sweet!" And stooping, I raised her hand, all unresisting, to my lips.

She did not speak, only I felt her hand tremble in my own, and one great sob shook her ere turning swiftly from me she sank into the nearest chair, and bowing her head upon her hands, broke out into passionate weeping.

For a moment I stared at her in silent wonder. Then I drew near to her side. "Do not grieve, madam," I said in a low voice. "I think—nay, I am sure—that your brother is now beyond pursuit."

Suddenly she raised her eyes all misty with their tears to mine. "And do you think, sir," she said brokenly, "that I weep alone—for him?"

"For whom else should you weep, madam?" I said wonderingly. And then something in her face gave me an inkling of the truth. I drew a long breath and continued: "Almost I could believe, madam, that in your womanly compassion you wept for me! My lady, I am not worthy of one tear from such as you. I am not strong enough to ask you to forget—but only to forgive me that I should cause you grief!" And kneeling at her side, as once before I had done, I raised the hem of her dress and pressed it to my lips.

"Not worthy?" she cried. "Nay, it is I who am unworthy—unworthy of your generosity—of the kindness you have shown to me and mine. Ah, Mr. Cassilis, have you nothing else to say to me?—no reproaches to heap upon me?"

I rose slowly to my feet. "Yes, there is one thing that is in my heart to say, my lady, if you will hear."

She raised her eyes with a look of startled inquiry to mine; then on a sudden a lovely colour suffused her face. Yet she did not say me nay.

"It is this, madam," I continued in a voice I vainly strove to render steady. "It may be that in a little time I must bid you farewell. Ere that time comes I would have you know that you have awakened within me that which had long been forgotten—that which I had all but lost. My life—the life of the sword—wandering from land to land, every man's servant, homeless, hopeless, has not been such that it should inspire pity in others—or regret to me. Yet until I met you I was well content to lead this life, to ruffle it with men whose daily life you, being a woman, therefore infinitely pure, could little understand—still less forgive. But now all this is changed. For you—you have restored in me the honour that as a gentleman was mine by birth; and though well I know a gulf impassable divides our lives, yet for your sake I would willingly face death itself to save you pain. In that prison to which I go—believe only in the years to come that, rough soldier though I am, my fondest prayers were for your future happiness. I may not say more—I dare not trust myself to say more. I

have done. God grant that this may be the only sorrow that shall cloud your life!"

"Oh," she cried, rising to her feet with a shuddering sob, "I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!" She raised her hands to her throat, struggling with her emotion. "I——"

There came the hoarse challenge of a sentry from without, followed by an immediate bustle in the hall as the troopers hastily assumed their arms. I crossed quickly to a small side window, and glancing out saw a party of three horsemen advancing up the avenue. Then I turned again to my lady. She had not moved from her position in the middle of the room. Motionless as a statue she stood, her hands pressed to her bosom, her eyes wide with sudden fear fixed upon the open door. At that instant the lieutenant appeared upon the threshold.

"Verdom!" he cried excitedly, buckling on his sword and brushing some stray crumbs from off his coat. "It is he! It is the general himself!"

"The general?" I stammered.

"No less," he answered. "Who would have expected his appearance?"

He drew himself stiffly to attention as the sound of spurred heels rang out from the hall, and a moment later three men entered the room.

He who came first was a man of most striking appearance. In age he might have been verging upon fifty, and his erect, martial figure and clean-shaven, handsome face showed to the keenest advantage in the uniform of a general of the British army. As if in scorn of the

follies of fashion, he wore no periwig, and his iron-grey hair clustered thickly upon his temples. Nor had he, so far as I could see, any decorations upon his breast that could proclaim him to be a person of distinction; but there was that in his face and bearing that needed no outward insignia to stamp him as a leader of men. In any company, in any costume, the man's individuality must have struck the most casual observer. Immediately behind him came an officer in the blue and white uniform of the Dutch dragoons. The third figure was that of Major Verbrughen.

But no sooner had my lady's eyes fallen upon the newcomer's face than she uttered an exclamation of surprise. Glancing swiftly in her direction, I saw that her face, that had a moment before been so pale, had flushed on a sudden to rose red.

"Sir Charles Trevelyan!" she cried.

I knew then with whom I had to deal. His was a name of wide repute—the Bayard of his time! A gentleman of stainless life and simple faith, combining in his person all the simplicity of a child, with the chivalry of a paladin of old. I knew that William upon landing had made him governor of Plymouth and reposed high confidence in his integrity. Now he advanced hat in hand and with a faltering step to my lady; and I saw that his face also bore traces of emotion.

"At your service, madam," he answered gravely, bowing over her hand. "Little did I think when last we parted that my duty would ever impose upon me so unwelcome a task. Being for the present, however, ap-

pointed commander of the troops in Devon, it occurred to me that I might by my presence spare you such trouble as lies in my power in this unhappy affair. But," he continued in a different tone, for the first time catching sight of me, "who have we here? Where is the Earl of Cleeve?"

"Under Providence, in safety!" I answered quietly, advancing a few steps.

For a moment he did not speak—he simply looked at me. Yet I felt that I cut but a poor figure under his gaze.

"Your name, sir?" he said abruptly.

"Adrian Cassilis," I answered with what grace I could muster, "captain in his Majesty's Tangier Horse." And now that the die was cast I felt my confidence returning.

"There is something here that I do not understand," he said slowly, crossing the room and seating himself beside the table. "Major Verbrughen, be good enough to explain the meaning of this masquerade?"

But by my faith the latter was little capable of explaining anything. His jaw had fallen, he stared at me in speechless surprise. Even the lieutenant's lean countenance had taken a more melancholy cast.

"Let that be my task general," I said, advancing to the table, "and first let me exonerate these gentlemen from all blame. It is a simple story, and can soon be told. The Earl of Cleeve is, as I have said, beyond pursuit. For the rest, these clothes I wear should be sufficient explanation."

He bent forward and gazed fixedly at me. "And how

comes it," he said at length, "that you are in this house?"

"I was in charge here," I answered simply.

His glance wandered from me to my lady, and I saw a sudden light of understanding leap into his eyes.

"Ah!" he said briefly, and leaned back in his chair.

After a moment's pause, in which I stole a glance at my lady, to see that her eyes were fixed upon the general with a dawning horror in their depths, the latter again addressed me.

"So you, a soldier, in time of war betrayed your trust," he said slowly, "and assisted his Grace to escape, knowing him to be the Earl of Cleeve!"

"For the friendship that I bear to him—yes!"

"You were aware he was proscribed—of the penalty attached to your offence? You did this—knowingly?"

"And willingly," I answered firmly.

Again he leant forward and bent his eyes upon me. I trust in that moment that I bore myself as a gentleman should.

"A pen here," he said abruptly, pointing to some writing materials that stood upon an oaken cabinet near.

The Dutch officer who had accompanied him stepped forward and laid them before him. After writing a few lines in a silence unbroken in the room save for the scratching of the pen, he raised his head.

"Colonel Zulestein," he said curtly, "you will see to the carrying out of this sentence, for which this shall be your warrant." And he held the paper out to him.

Ere the latter could take it, however, my lady, who had

drawn gradually nearer to the table while he had been writing, snatched the paper from his hand. But no sooner had her eyes fallen upon what was written there than a cry of pain escaped her lips.

"To be shot!" she cried wildly. "To be shot at dawn!" She swayed so violently that I took a step or two forward to assist her. Even the general had risen to his feet at sight of her distress.

"Madam, I would have spared you this had I but known," he said quickly. "But my duty is imperative."

She did not answer him—she did not even seem to hear. Only for a moment she raised her hands to her brow and a single sob broke the silence of the room. Then she turned and came towards me. And I? I awaited her approach, my hands clenched, my knees trembling. Within a pace of me she stopped, and her eyes, wide and fear-stricken, seemed to read my inmost thoughts.

"When," she said at length in a low, strained voice, "you did this for me you *knew?*"

"Yes!"

Still for a moment longer her eyes clung to mine, ere, turning, she moved slowly to where the general stood beside the table. "Send these men away!" she said in a low voice, though every word was plain to hear. The room was very still. For a moment he looked surprised, then:

"Major Verbrughen," he said sternly, "it would be well for you to make enquiries at the harbour. I think that you will find there all that we wish to know. And another time, sir, be not so hasty in jumping to conclusions!

Colonel Zulestein, be good enough to remain within call!".

The three officers saluted with military brevity and left the room.

"Now, madam," he continued, reseating himself, "you wish to speak to me?"

Even from where I stood I could see that it was only with an effort that she conquered her emotion as she drew a step nearer to him.

"Sir Charles Trevelyan," she said in a low voice, "a year ago you did me the honour to ask me to become your wife. Oh, by the memory of the love you then professed for me grant me this that now I ask—spare this man's life!"

I stared at her in speechless surprise. This was not my lady, proud and cold, but a passionate woman pleading for life itself. I think that the general was equally astonished.

"Madam," he said at length, "I would that you had asked me anything but this. With the country so unsettled, an example must be made—there is no other course to take. For your brother's landing and for the late rising here, I fear I can hold out little hope but that your estates will be confiscated. Believe me, dear lady, such influence as I possess shall be used in your behalf; but this—this that you have asked is impossible."

"Ah, no," my lady cried in a pitiful voice, "not impossible, my lord, for with you rests the power of life and death, and in your hands lies all my future happiness! What has he done that he should deserve to die? What

has he done that you would not have done had you been in his place—for me? Ah, my lord, my lord, be generous to me in this!"

He gazed up at her, moved I could see by her entreaty. On a sudden he rose slowly to his feet.

"You ask this man's life at my hands," he said quietly. "Why?"

My lady's back was towards me—I could not see her face. But plainly to my ears there came these whispered words:

"Because I love him!"

I think that a cry escaped my lips. Yet I stood rooted to the spot—immovable. But only for a moment. Then I understood.

"Madam, madam!" I cried: "This must not be!" Then, as she turned towards me, I continued: "I know that in your generous heart you would save me if you could—that you would fain repay the debt you think you owe me—but that which I have done I have done without regret." I would have said more, continued more, had I been able; but such a wondrous light was upon my lady's face that I faltered and grew silent.

"Madam," the general said after a moment's pause, leaning forward and gazing into her eyes—the table only was between—"will you repeat those words?"

"I love him!" she answered simply. "I believe in him—I trust him!" she added slowly; and turning to the general, who had again resumed his seat, she added proudly: "My lord, you have my answer."

"And yet," the latter said after a moment's pause,

"after what you have said, madam—knowing me to be the arbiter of his fate—you can still ask me to spare his life?"

"It is for the very reason that I know what you are that I appeal now to your honour," my lady answered passionately. "To no other man would I so plead."

He leaned forward, resting one elbow upon the table and covering his eyes with his hand. Stern soldier though he was, I could see that he was trembling.

"Believe me," she continued in a softer tone, advancing a few steps nearer to him, "I am sorry that my words should grieve you—should cause you pain! But in this one matter at least I have cast aside all modesty and shame. Ah, my lord, in your chivalry, and for the sake of what is past, will you not pleasure me in this? I am not a woman whose love would ever change; and holding my secret as you do—oh, be pitiful to me, and true unto your noble nature!"

For a moment he remained still and silent, then he rose slowly to his feet.

"There are some men," he said quietly, "who would demand their own price for granting your request. I will not take the hand without the heart." He paused and cast a long look upon my lady. "Give me the paper that you hold in your hand, madam," he added abruptly.

Without a word she laid the fatal order upon the table before him, and taking it up, he tore it across and across and flung the pieces from him. Then raising his voice: "Colonel Zulestein!" The Dutch officer appeared upon the threshold. "I have altered my decision concern-

ing this man," the general said briefly. "You, colonel, will remain in charge of this house until his Majesty's pleasure concerning it be known! Captain Cassilis," he continued sternly, "I grant you your life on this condition only—that you leave the shores of England within twenty-four hours. Should you be found within the country after that time your life will pay the forfeit. Colonel Zulestein, you will see that this order is duly carried out." The officer briefly saluted.

"Ah, my lord—my generous lord!" my lady cried, moving towards him with outstretched hands. He caught them in his own.

"No more, madam," he said quickly. "What I do I do for your sake. Myself I cannot forgive for the breach of the duty that I owe my king. Yet for the future my highest happiness shall be to call myself your friend." He raised her hands quickly to his lips, gave one long look into her eyes, then, dropping her hands, without one glance at me he quitted the room, and the Dutch colonel followed him.

It was not until the last sound of their spurred heels had ceased that the apathy that had hitherto held me seemed to vanish. So my life was spared—saved by my lady—but at what a price! I turned now to look at her.

She had sank into the nearest chair, and her face was turned from me. My eyes wandered round the now familiar room that I should see no more, and then with a wildly beating heart I drew near to her side. She neither stirred nor spoke as within a pace of her I stopped,

overcome by my emotion. Ah, how lovely she was—how lovely! Never had my heart cried out so for one kind word as upon this our last parting.

Though her face was averted, I could gaze unrebuked upon the soft masses of her hair, gleaming with a golden sheen in the light—upon the faultless curve of her white shoulders, her exquisitely moulded arms, and the scent of violets that seemed ever to surround her was wafted to me where I stood. And I knew that it was for the last time—that I must go out to again commence the old weary life of wandering that, in the last few weeks, had faded into a distant memory of the past. A dream—naught but a dream, yet passing sweet while it lasted! In the awakening only was the pain.

Involuntarily I shivered as the dreary prospect of the future years rose up before my eyes.

"Madam," I said at length hoarsely, "I have lingered to say farewell. I may no longer stay beneath your roof. What can I say to you? How can I thank you for that which you have done? What words of mine can be but inadequate—or aught but poor! What it has cost you to act as you have done I can but dimly guess! My lady, forget the words that you have spoken. They shall be as if they had never been—save to be treasured in my heart through all the years to come." I paused trembling, and waited for her reply. Yet for a moment she did not speak.

"But," she said at length in a low voice, without turning her head, "what if I do not choose to forget. Are you so sure, sir, that I was only acting?"

"How, madam!" I stammered. "I—I do not understand!"

"When you leave this house, sir," she said in the same low tone, "what do you intend to do?"

"I shall cross to France, madam," I answered, "and from thence to Flanders! There is always work there for a good sword—there is always fortune to be won there—or a nameless grave!" With a quick movement she rose to her feet.

"You go to France," she said in a voice that thrilled me—"to France, whither my brother has already gone! Ah, Mr. Cassilis, will you not take me too?"

I could but stare at her in speechless wonder. Her face as she turned it towards me was so radiantly beautiful that the words I would have spoken died away upon my lips. She noted my confusion with a tender smile.

"There is nothing further that should keep me here," she continued. "My sister is about to wed, and the name of Courtenay will secure her from any punishment the government would inflict—their services to William are too well known. But with me it is different. I have rendered my name notorious, and I am not minded to lose my liberty along with our estates. Therefore, I shall join my brother across the water. That is one reason, sir," she said slowly, and came to a pause. A lovely colour suffused her face and neck. From beneath her long lashes she flashed a glance at me that set my heart beating furiously. "There is another," she faltered. "You shame me to say it—I—it is—oh don't you understand?" And she stretched out her arms to me.

And then indeed I understood. Understood—that God in His great mercy had given me His best earthly gift—a pure woman's love. Yet for a moment I stepped backwards, battling with my own happiness.

"Ah, madam, madam," I cried hoarsely, "is it so with you? Is it indeed so? Yet how can this be? You are a great lady, and I?— God help me! what am I?"

A wondrously tender light shone in her eyes. The colour deepened in her face with her sweet yielding shame.

"You are the keeper of my heart," she whispered in reply; "my lover—and my king!" I caught her hands in mine and raised them to my lips.

"Listen," she continued softly, ere I could find words to speak. "I was proud and cold to you, dear love, against my own heart's teaching. I am proud still! Prouder in your love than ever I was before! I would rather share your exile than be the richest lady in the land! In fortune or distress, in poverty or prison—so that I am with *you*, sir, I care not what befalls!" And at those words of sweet surrender I hesitated no longer, but took her in my arms, and in a long, long kiss of betrothal her lips met mine.

"See!" she whispered a moment later, gently disengaging herself and pointing to the window, where a grey light was stealing into the room. "It is the dawn—the dawn of hope—and happiness!"

I glanced once at the fair landscape, already lightening with the coming day, then my eyes again sought the face of the lovely woman at my side.

"And of love," I answered in reply. "Ah God! my love! my queen!"

* * * * *

And so it befell that when, eighteen hours later, from the deck of the *Good Adventure*, I watched the shores of England recede into the purple mists of evening, my lady sat beside me, her hand in mine. A soft breeze played in the cordage overhead, from away forward came ever and anon a snatch of song. The crimson light faded slowly from the sky—faded—grew fainter—died! The soft summer night enwrapped us round.

"Sweetheart," I said tenderly, bending towards her, gazing too to where her eyes were fixed upon the distant lights in the home she had renounced, "you will not regret? You will always so love me in the years to come?"

For answer my lady raised her proud face to mine—with love alight, in perfect trust.

"Until the end!" she whispered in reply, "and after—in the fuller life—beyond!"

And what was poverty and exile to me then, for were we not together?

THE END

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